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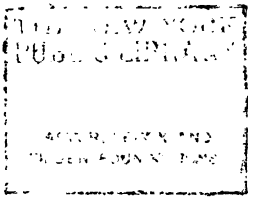

COMING IN FROM THE SEA

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ON

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W. H. POPE

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ER INNES SHAND

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WILD-FOWL

BY

L. H. DE VISME SHAW

WITH CHAPTERS ON

SHOOTING THE DUCK AND THE GOOSE

BY W. H. POPE

COOKERY

BY ALEXANDER INNES SHAND

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS BY ARCHIBALD THORBURN AND CHARLES WHYMPER

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
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1905

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PREFACE

THE design of the *Fur, Feather, and Fin Series* is to present monographs, as complete as they can possibly be made, on the various English birds, beasts, and fishes which are generally included under the head of Game.

Books on Natural History cover such a vast number of subjects that their writers necessarily find it impossible to deal with each in a really comprehensive manner; and it is not within the scope of such works exhaustively to discuss the animals described, in the light of objects of sport. Books on sport, again, seldom treat at length of the Natural History of the creatures which are shot or otherwise taken; and, so far as the Editor is aware, in no book hitherto published on Natural History or Sport has information been given as to the best methods of turning the contents of the bag to account.

Each volume of the present Series will, therefore, be devoted to a bird, beast, or fish. Their origin will be traced, their birth and breeding described, every known method of circumventing and killing them—not omitting the methods employed by the poacher—will be explained with special regard to modern developments, and they will only be left when on the table in the most appetising forms which the delicate science of cookery has discovered.

ALFRED E. T. WATSON.

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NATURAL HISTORY OF THE DUCK

BY

L. H. DE VISME SHAW

DUCK IN GENERAL AND IN PARTICULAR

THERE are two clearly divided orders of the duck family—the one composed of those birds which dive for their food, and the other of those which find their food on or just beneath the surface. As the principal sustenance of the diving duck lies well beneath the surface, they have been compelled to adopt the habit of entirely immerging the body in order to obtain it, and they remain a considerable time under water. When surface-feeding duck search for food beneath the surface they do not immerge the body to a greater extent than that adopted by ducks on a farm-yard pond. As a general rule, diving duck feed during the hours of daylight, and rest by night ; while surface-feeding duck feed between dusk and dawn, and rest during the day.

Any description of plumage which may appear in the following pages must be taken to apply only to

the winter plumage of adult birds. With the coming of the breeding season the males of most of the *anatidæ* assume a dingy, or comparatively dingy, garb, which more or less closely resembles that of the females. In the case of the mallard, for instance, the glossy feathers of head and neck and wing, the snow-white collar, and the colours of breast and back are all discarded, their place being taken by plumage exactly resembling that of his mate. Not till the autumn is he again found in his full brilliant feathering. The young birds of some of the duck retain their immature plumage till the spring following their birth, and thus do not appear in adult winter feathers until upwards of a year and a half old. Taking the long-tailed duck as an example: in winter we have on our coast the mature males with their elongated rectrices; the immature males whose elongated rectrices have not appeared; the mature females, and the young females whose plumage is as yet immature—all differing so much from each other that one unstudied in ornithology would unhesitatingly declare them to be distinct duck.

Young duck are unable to fly till long after their hatching.

THE TUFTED DUCK (*Fuligula cristata*)

This duck, length about 17 inches, is to be recognised by the tuft of elongated feathers at the back of the head. The male has the breast and all the upper part of a metallic black, and the under plumage pure white; the female is dark brown above, and a greyish white below. The tufted duck nests in many parts of our islands. Migrants reach us towards the end of October. The majority of these migrants at once work their way inland, making fresh water their winter home. They are usually found in pairs, or in small bunches of not more than five or six. During certain seasons they are very abundant in favoured districts. The tufted duck is one of the least wary of all its tribe. When killed on fresh water it is excellent for the table, but a bird that has been gaining its living on salt water is condemned by many as being unpleasantly rank in flavour. The tufted duck will swim rather than fly from approaching danger, a habit that very often leads to its death at the hands of inland sportsmen; for, when sighted on river, stream, or dyke, far out of shot, and yet so near that mallard similarly situated would be up and off in a moment, the tufted duck will merely paddle swiftly

away, and the gunner can so calculate his movements that, by making a *détour*, he is able to bring himself within comfortable range. The bird is a diving duck.

Food: animal and vegetable in much variety, including insects, grass, small shell-fish, seeds, and grain.

THE POCHARD (*Fuligula ferina*)

The pochard, a diving duck, may be known by its ruddy chestnut head and neck, its black breast, and its body of pale grey mottled with countless delicate specks and wavings of darker hue. The female has a dusky, reddish-brown head, ash-coloured breast, and a back of darker shade than that of the male. In length the pochard is about 20 inches. Migrants begin to arrive during the early part of October. The pochard is known locally as the dun-bird, the poker, and the red-head. Years ago pochard visited us in enormous numbers—in such numbers, indeed, that an ingenious method of taking them could be largely and profitably practised in the eastern counties, where then, as now, the bird existed much more abundantly than elsewhere in our islands. In Daniel's 'Rural Sports' the method is thus described:—

A decoy for dun-birds is called a flight-pond, and has

nets fastened to tall, stout poles, twenty-eight or thirty feet long; at the bottom of each pole is fixed a box, filled with heavy stones, sufficient to elevate the poles and nets the instant an iron pin is withdrawn, which retains the nets and poles flat upon the reeds, small willow boughs, or furze. Withinside the nets are small pens, made of reeds about three feet high, for the reception of the birds that strike against the nets and fall down; and such is the form and shortness of the wing of the pochard, that they cannot ascend again from these little enclosures if they would; besides, the numbers which are usually knocked into these pens preclude all chance of escape from them by the wing. A decoy-man will sometimes allow the haunt of dun-birds to be so great that the whole surface of the pond shall be covered with them previous to his attempting to take one. . . . When all is ready the dun-birds are roused from the pond, and as all wild-fowl rise against the wind, the poles in that quarter are unpinned, and fly up with the nets at the instant the dun-birds begin to leave the surface of the water, so as to meet them in their first ascent; and they are thus beat down by hundreds.

Other accounts speak of a trench, instead of pens, at the foot of the nets. According to my own experience, the pochard is the most wary of all our duck, and has a finer sense of hearing than any other. Where little disturbed, pochard evince a strong partiality for fresh water. During the winter the pochard is common in nearly every district which provides conditions suited to its mode of life. The

bird nests, but not freely, in the British Islands. Shot on fresh water, the pochard is a good duck for the table.

Food: animal and vegetable, including grass, grain, seeds, and shell-fish.

THE SHOVELLER (*Anas clypeata*)

So unerringly may one recognise the shoveller by the curiously formed bill from which it takes its name, that any description of the bird's beautiful and many-hued plumage is unnecessary. This bill, about 3 inches in length, is widened at the extremity, the lower mandible being shaped like a spoon. Shovellers reach us later than most duck. The migrants usually remain for only a brief time on the coast, inland waters being their goal; one may sometimes see several of them on the saltings of the east coast at the migration period, but the following day one's glasses generally fail to reveal them. The length of the shoveller is about 20 inches. The bird breeds in many parts of the kingdom. Mr. William Howlett, the widely-known naturalist and sportsman, writes to me, from Barton Mills: 'Shovellers often remain with us all the year, and in the famous Tuddenham fen, a great wild-duck resort, I have often found their nests.'

The shoveller is the least shy and wary of all our duck. Shovellers are fairly numerous on the dykes and tributaries of the East Anglian main rivers, and are common on most of the Norfolk Broads. The shoveller is highly esteemed by epicures. It is a surface-feeding duck.

Food: animal and vegetable in great variety, including *mollusca*, aquatic insects and their larvæ, and shell-fish.

THE GADWALL (*Anas strepera*)

This duck is rarely to be found except in the eastern counties. Many years ago, gadwall, so the old fen-men used to tell one, were common in some of the fens, and were much prized by fowlers of the time. Later—partly on account of its continuous persecution by wild-fowlers, and partly on account of increasing drainage—the bird became almost extinct in the locality. Concerning its present plenty, I quote the words of Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey:—

> Its abundance (in Norfolk) is the result of a pair of these birds caught in the South Acre Decoy that were pinioned and turned down on the lake at Narford, where they bred freely and attracted many others, which also remained to nest on this lake. The number of gadwall which frequent one private water alone in this county is

computed at from fourteen to fifteen hundred birds. They originated, as described, some years ago, and have spread all over West Norfolk, wherever they could find shelter and protection and were allowed to breed freely, and are now as frequently seen on the wing as any other species. They are purely wild in Norfolk, and this shows how one of the most beautiful and rare of our migratory ducks may be acclimatised in suitable localities.

It is calculated that upwards of a thousand pairs of gadwall now breed annually in south-west Norfolk. The gadwall, a surface-feeding duck, is to be recognised by its general plumage of richly-mottled and pencilled grey, and the three bars of chestnut, black and white, upon its outstretched wing. In length the gadwall is about 20 inches. It is known locally as the grey duck. On the table it is excellent.

Food: animal and vegetable in great variety, including grain and aquatic insects.

THE PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*)

The pintail, often called the sea-pheasant, has, like the shoveller, a feature which renders its identification easy. This feature is the long tail, from which the bird's name is derived. The two middle tail feathers, which taper to a sharp point, project about

5 inches beyond the others. The male pintail is the most graceful, as well as one of the most beautiful, of all our duck.[1] His mate's plumage is of many shades of brown; the projection beyond the others of the two middle tail feathers of the female bird is slight, not more than about three-quarters of an inch. Pintail in certain districts are fairly common duck during every season. Sometimes, when really hard weather sets in, one finds them numerous on the east coast of England. They have never been known to nest in our islands in a purely wild state. Occasionally migrants reach us as early as the latter part of September. Pintail visit inland waters freely, and will make a suitable spot their winter home if not too frequently disturbed, or if not again driven to the coast by severe weather. The male pintail measures about 27 inches. Most people who taste a pintail declare it to be the best of all duck for the table. The pintail is a surface-feeding duck.

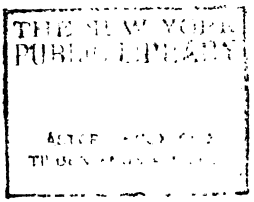
Food: animal and vegetable in great variety, including grain, seeds, and aquatic insects and mollusca.

[1] Lest from this brief description the pintail should at some time or another be confused with the long-tailed duck (*Fuligula glacialis*), one may add that the speculum of the former contains glossy green feathers, whereas that of the latter is a dull brown.

THE TEAL (*Querquedula crecca*)

The length of the teal is only about 14½ inches; as the bird may be at once recognised by its small size, any description of its plumage is unnecessary. It is a surface-feeding duck. Teal breed more or less freely in many parts of the British Islands. Migrants begin to reach us as early as the latter part of September. Most of the migrant birds seek fresh water soon after their arrival. Teal may be encountered in every part of the kingdom where there exists what can be called water in the wider sense, though they are seldom really numerous in any given district. One does not often find more than a very few teal together when the birds are inland, but on the coast, when driven from their fresh-water haunts by stress of weather, they are to be seen in bunches some hundreds strong. In open weather those birds which frequent the shore usually form into comparatively small bunches of from half a dozen or so up to forty or fifty. The teal when inland prefers running to stagnant water; its favourite haunt, according to my own experience, being a stream with a sandy bed. The flight of the teal is extraordinarily rapid; the bird springs upwards like a rocket, and is then off and

TEAL DROPPING INTO COVER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away at a prodigious pace. The teal is less wary than most duck. Its popularity for the table is great.

Food: vegetable, including grass and seeds, with a small proportion of animal.

THE WIDGEON (*Anas Penelope*)

The head of the widgeon, a surface-feeding duck, is chestnut, with the top of a pale buff tint; the breast is pale greyish chestnut; the under part of the bird is white; the back is very light grey, pencilled with fine zigzag markings of black; the secondary wing-feathers are a rich green. The female is a sober-plumaged bird, mottled brown above and white below. In length the widgeon is about 18 inches. As a purely wild bird the widgeon does not nest in England; in the extreme north of Scotland it breeds regularly, and, so one is told, has also been known to nest in Ireland. Early migrants reach the north-east coast of Scotland during September, but the main body, in enormous numbers, does not appear till the middle of the following month, or later if the season in northern Europe should be an open one. As the weather becomes sharper the birds move southward

and westward, soon spreading themselves over every part of our coasts where their food, sea-grass (*Zostera marina*) is to be found. It is the sea-grass which gives the widgeon that somewhat rank flavour so repellent to many people, a fact evidenced by the highly palatable quality of the flesh of a bird which has been living for several weeks on fresh water and feeding upon inland grasses. Such a bird is fully equal to a fresh-water mallard for the table. Widgeon are very much more numerous than any other kind of duck known to the coast gunner. The widgeon is often called locally the 'whe-oh' or half-fowl. In wild-fowling parlance, widgeon are known as cock and hen, instead of male and female, or duck and drake; while, locally, 'a couple' of widgeon, as of teal, means four birds. Widgeon feed to a large extent by day.

Food: vegetable, sea-grass on the coast, meadow grasses inland.

THE MALLARD (*Anas boschas*)

The mallard, a surface-feeding duck, may be recognised by its resemblance to the common domestic duck, of which it is the ancestor. Mallard breed in every district of our islands where they find condi-

tions—sufficient expanse of water and freedom from disturbance—suited to their well-being, and there will they remain throughout the year unless there come frost sufficiently hard to seal all their food supplies, in which case they quickly find their way to the coast, where they remain till the severe weather is over. Migrant mallard reach our shores in large numbers at the time of the autumn flight, the majority of them seeking a home on inland waters. Those which remain on the coast spend their days far out on the salt water, and their nights either on the muds and saltings, or else on some inland feeding-ground within easy reach of the tide. The mallard, one of the very best of table birds, measures about 24 inches. Where little disturbed, mallard are comparatively easy to approach; but on the coast, or on water to which the public have access, one finds them, on account of constant persecution, among the most wary of duck. Mallard will occasionally nest at a height of many feet above the ground—as, for instance, in the fork formed by a large branch of a tree at its juncture with the trunk, or on a partly-cut or loosely-thatched stack—and, strangely enough, the young birds seem always to reach the ground in safety. There exists a pure white variety of the mallard, generally known as the white witch duck of the fens, which is becoming

more and more popular among owners of preserved waters. It has been stated that the original stronghold of this bird was the famous Wicken fen, a few miles south of Ely, the only piece of original fen which draining has left to us. Here a number of white mallard once found sanctuary. Now, however, so the Vicar of Wicken informs me, the white duck no longer make the fen their quarters, though stray birds visit it from neighbouring preserves. Wicken fen was the last home of the beautiful large copper butterfly.

Food: animal and vegetable in very great variety.

Here we close the list of duck which demand individual notice. There are altogether some thirty members of the duck family which visit or have been known to visit our islands. Of these, about a third are of such rare occurrence that few sportsmen can reasonably hope to encounter them; of the remaining two-thirds, those over and above the eight duck briefly described in the foregoing pages are either wholly uneatable or else of so rank a flavour that no ordinary mortal could bring himself to feed upon them while any palatable viand remained at his disposal; hence one cannot rightly give them notice in a series devoted to the Natural History, the killing

and the cooking of fur, feather, and fin. However interesting the gaudy and beautiful sheldrake, the sable scoter, the sober scaup, and the snowy-breasted golden-eye may be to the naturalist, they are of no interest as quarry to the self-respecting gunner or as culinary subjects to the self-respecting cook.

That the duck has been popular with man as an article of food since the very dawn of our race is attested by the fact that wild-duck bones have been discovered among the unconsidered trifles thrown to the ground by troglodytes of the Stone Age. In Lepsius's 'Denkmäler aus Ægypten' and elsewhere are to be seen drawings of Egyptian monuments ranging in date from 3000 B.C. to 1000 B.C. which represent duck being taken by means of a net, and also being killed by the boomerang—the weapon whizzing through the air in the direction of the birds. The duck is common in the art of ancient Babylon. By the Romans, the head and breast of a duck were considered choice delicacies. The Anglo-Saxon name for duck was 'enid'; enid rake, the ruling duck, is almost undoubtedly the origin of our word drake. The word duck comes from the Danish 'dukke' or the Dutch 'duiken,' to dive or stoop Mallard is the Norman mâle in anglicised garb. Duck, as a term

of endearment, has nothing to do with the bird, but is 'dokke,' a doll. In the Earl of Northumberland's 'Household Book,' date 1512, the price given for mallard appears as twopence each, teal—spelt 'teylle' —being bought for half that sum.

SHOOTING THE DUCK

BY

L. H. DE VISME SHAW

[illegible] to do with the bird, but is [illegible] the Earl of Northumberland's [illegible] the price given for [illegible]—spelt 'teylle' [illegible]

SHOOTING THE DUCK

BY

L. H. DE VISME SHAW

C 2

CHAPTER I

SHOOTING THE DUCK AT SEA.

A WHOLE host of people—excellent in their way, no doubt—who have heard or read with more or less understanding of what takes place when a punt-gunner has succeeded in making his way within ideal range of a large company of widgeon, look upon wild-fowling as wanton butchery, and, according to their way of thinking, even more unsportsmanlike than covert beating and partridge driving. Just as they imagine, and sometimes rush into print about, hordes of helpless—always helpless—pheasants as tame as barndoor fowls massacred in cold blood by a body of men calling themselves sportsmen, who slay their victims simply to gratify a debased, and quite incomprehensible, lust for slaughter; so do they imagine flocks—always flocks—of duck peacefully and innocently resting on the placid sea, while the wicked wild-fowler calmly paddles up in his punt, trains his

miniature cannon—always miniature cannon—on the helpless—again always helpless—birds, and blows them out of the water. After blowing one flock out of the water, he paddles off and does the same thing to another flock, and so on and so on, feeding his debased slaughter-lust to satiety. The picture is not overdrawn.

These good people have no idea of the realities of the wild-fowler's craft, or of the realities of any kind of shooting. To their unsophisticated humanitarian intelligences all sport is wanton and inhuman, all sportsmen are degraded victims of the lust for blood. Punt-gunning needs no defence in the eyes of those who know what it really is, namely, the most arduous, exacting, and uncertain of all forms of English sport, a pursuit which demands consummate observation, calculation, patience, skill, and virility on the part of whomsoever would engage in it successfully, and in which the disappointments and failures are very many and the rewards very few and very small. One would like to take some of the idiots who, wholly ignorant of the practical side of the subject, air their periods in gratuitous defamation of 'blood sports' and sportsmen, and subject them just for a time to a compulsory course of punt-gunning experiences. Unless their nerves gave way,

under the strain or their bodies collapsed, it would do them a world of good. We should hear no more from them about helpless flocks of ducks; what we should probably hear would be expressions of wonderment at the strangeness of any man being able to derive a grain of pleasure from passing a bitter winter's day in a horribly uncomfortable punt, making occasional efforts to approach unapproachable birds, and perhaps at last, as the result of the keenest calculation, securing the chance of firing a shot yielding half a dozen widgeon.

A similar course of experiences among partridges and pheasants might do as much good to other idiots who, their imagination running riot, or writing on the authority of some brother idiot whose ignorance they take for knowledge, make the vilification of the game-preserver and shooter their speciality. Sportsmen almost without exception have the liveliest and most cordial sympathy with all movements tending to suppress cruelty and lessen suffering, and to give mankind an exalted view of his moral obligations towards the lower animal creation; but of the silly, effeminate ignoramuses who shriek against sport—the Briton's birthright—and the imagined iniquities of its followers, they can have no feeling save contempt mingled with some amusement and a little pity.

'To stalk in a punt'—as bearing upon the foregoing paragraphs, I am quoting the well-known words of the most practical exponent of wild-fowling who has written in our own time—'a number of fowl, whether geese or duck, on broad shelterless waters, will often require the manœuvring of a general, the patience, silence, and cunning of an experienced deer-stalker, and the hardihood and pluck of a life-boat crew, together with the cool, watchful eye of its coxswain. The chances are always, save on the rarest occasions, in favour of the birds and against the shooter. . . . We have known men accustomed to tiger-shooting, to elephant-slaying, to stalking of every sort and kind, to salmon-fishing, and to all the sports and most of the excitements of the world, admit that during the few minutes previous to drawing in shot of a vast assembly of wild-fowl, with a big swivel gun cocked and ready before them as they lay prone in the punt, their hearts seemed to beat louder than ever they did before. At such a moment an intense anxiety takes possession of the merest novice lest the birds should fly off before he can obtain a shot. . . . He sees geese, duck, widgeon, and teal, and many other birds, as he never saw them before, swimming, washing, playing, and calling within a hundred yards of him. . . . Perhaps he gets within

shot, aims true, and then picks up his score or two of beautifully plumaged birds; but it must be observed that this is no easy matter except under the most favourable conditions of wind and tide. After such a shot, a rest, a pull at his flask, and a look at the spoil, he vows that wild-fowl-shooting is about as hard and as exciting a sport as can be imagined. If, when in shot, he misses, which is an extremely easy thing to do, it only makes him more anxious to succeed better next time, and his one fear is that he will not have another equally good chance. A sportsman once touched with the fever of wild-fowl-shooting afloat, or who has once felt the charm of success in this fascinating and scientific sport, will never give it up so long as his strength will stand the exposure it is necessary to undergo.'

A whole host of other people, shooting-people this time, hold ideas on the subject of wild-fowling which practical experience would very soon dispel. The chief of these ideas is that with regard to the degree of sport which falls to the lot of the average fowler on our coasts. People think the punt-gunner makes infinitely better bags than he really does. I suppose this erroneous impression—I have found it almost general among inland shooting men—is the outcome of reading wild-fowling matter in the press.

Many of the punting fraternity contribute experiences to various papers of various classes. These writings detail the sunny side—the occasional big shot in occasional weather, the occasional week during which luck and skill combined have run up a total worth talking about. Of the other side—periods when the fowl are so few that blank or almost blank days follow one another in dejecting succession, times when the birds are near at hand in abundance, and yet are put beyond the gunner's reach by the state of the sea, spells of waiting on and setting up to duck and geese, whose vigilance it is found almost impossible to circumvent, days which are full of promise, yet in which some unforeseen circumstance wrecks the accomplishment of every prospective shot—we seldom hear. The consequence is that very many people think they have only to buy a punt and gun in order to secure certain and first-class sport. The majority—as far as my own experience in the matter is a guide—of those who start punt work throw up the game in disgust after a brief trial. Their patience meets with no sufficient reward: they think the possibilities and probabilities of wild-fowling have been greatly exaggerated: their first experience is enough for them: they can see nothing in the sport compared with the certain and

continuous sport at the command of the dry-land gunner. The sunny side has been too vividly impressed upon them: the contrast of the real with the ideal has proved too great.

That man who is weak enough to imagine that there is any short cut to success in shooting wild-fowl afloat, and acts upon his belief, is fore-doomed to certain disappointment. Not all the advice ever written will give him the knowledge, the skill, and the powers of observation and calculation which are requisite before he can make himself a wild-fowler of even moderate calibre. These things are only to be learned in the schools of failure and practical experience. However good an inland sportsman a man may be, he must start from the beginning when he takes to the water. He must learn the habits and peculiarities of the different fowl; he must learn how to manage his punt from the prone position, an art in itself; he must learn to judge distance on water, so different a thing from judging distance on land; he must tell what is the most favourable moment for setting up to the birds; he must learn when to fire and how to fire. And after he has learned all this and more, and, with several seasons' experience behind him, is entitled to rank as on old hand, he will still find that

disappointment and failure must always play a very large part in wild-fowling. Every calculation is upset again and again. In those gloriously uncertain three minutes which precede a possible shot, any one of a dozen absolutely fatal things may happen. Even when everything has gone well, and the gunner finds himself within range, the slightest mistake in aiming or in choosing the moment to pull the trigger may mean the difference of a possible heavy shot, and merely two or three couple of birds, or very likely none at all.

As I would warn an uninitiated reader in the foregoing matters, so also would I warn him against the use of the punt if he is in any way constitutionally weak or nervous. Should he suffer in these respects, it is far better for him to leave the whole thing alone. Wild-fowling afloat is hard, rough, and often risky work—work for the physically and mentally robust, for the man who is tough enough to stand long exposure without feeling it, who can rely upon his presence of mind under any circumstances, and not for one whose shaky points are told upon by cold and wet, or one who may lose his head at some critical juncture, and, failing resource, come to grief thereby. Every punt-gunner who takes the legitimate risks of his sport finds himself at one time

or another in some situation which would prove a remarkably unpleasant one if he were bereft of coolness and judgment. A punt is not the safest of salt-water craft, weather changes are often very rapid, and excitement now and again leads nearly every fowler to run risks which he would not be inclined to run in cold blood. 'Caution' is a very excellent motto for the fowler.

Wild-fowling afloat may be divided into two branches: the use of the single-handed and that of the double-handed punt; and punt-gunners into two classes, the many who work from the shore, and the few who have the time and means to cruise in a shooting yacht. Needless to say the latter class has many advantages over the former—quarters may be shifted at will; fowl haunting feeding grounds far out at sea may be watched in comfort pending the arrival of a favourable time for attempting a shot. The large majority of punt-gunners are limited to sport in the immediate locality of their homes, or of the centre they have chosen as the base for their operations. Of this majority, the many rely solely on their punts; the few make use of what is generally known as a following boat—a rowing boat of light draught—which tows the punt, and in which the gunner and his man sail or row in search of

sport, the punt being launched at fowl when they are found.

The fowling punt is a narrow, flat-bottomed craft, painted to appear as inconspicuous in the water as possible. With its light draught it can be used in very shallow water. It is decked fore and aft and at the sides. Round the cockpit runs low coaming, parts of which can be folded down or removed, in order to allow the puntsman's or gunner's arm or arms free movement when using paddles, setting-pole or scull. On the fore-deck lies the heavy swivel-gun, breeched so that its recoil is taken up by the punt. The gunner when setting up to fowl lies prone in the cockpit, his head but just high enough to enable him to see the birds.

To deal fully with all that could be said on the punt and the swivel-gun would entail writing at far greater length than the scope of this volume allows. Exhaustive descriptions are to be found in different works on wild-fowling, and to these the reader is referred. Individual fowlers as well as the fowlers of certain localities are biassed in favour of certain details of the size and proportions of their punt and the weight of their guns. Within rational limits, the make and size of a punt are not of more than small importance, but if these limits are exceeded in the one

or the other direction, either the user's sport will fall short of the best possible or else his personal safety will be subjected to considerable risk. The balance has to be struck somewhere between speediness and handiness on the one hand and safety on the other; between the slow heavy tub which was good enough when gunners were few and fowl plentiful and tame—a type still favoured by certain sportsmen of the more nervous or discreet kind—and the really dangerous craft one sometimes sees in use on the coast, there is a highly desirable mean. Though a punt must be slight and fast, in the long run there is no advantage derived from cutting things very fine; shots may be had in still water from a very slight and fast punt which might or would have been unattainable from a slower one with more beam; but, on the other hand, the heavier punt can be launched at fowl under conditions which would render the use of the slight punt dangerous or decidedly risky. Of course if a punt be required only for use on some sheltered estuary, it may be built on slighter lines than one in which the wild-fowler's ordinary risks are taken. In the opinion of the very large majority of fowlers, Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey has said, in the 'Badminton Library,' the last word that can be said on punt dimensions. As the question is of the first importance to

duck-shooters, I venture to give abridged quotations of his figures.

A single-handed punt for paddling to fowl, to carry a swivel-gun of from [1] 80 lbs. to 112 lbs. weight, and a man of about 12 stone, may be :—

	ft.	in.
Total length	18	2
Length on floor	17	3
Extreme width on floor . .	2	8
„ „ across decks .	3	0
Height of stem	0	5
„ „ stern	0	8
Length of fore-deck . . .	7	6
„ „ after-deck . . .	4	0
Greatest width of cockpit . .	2	0

This punt is designed for use with paddles. The gunner, when setting up to fowl, lies with his face downwards, his arms reaching through the shutter openings, and across the side decks, and propels himself by means of a short paddle held in either hand. The paddles are kept always under the water, where they are feathered for the forward stroke. When within extreme range, he, if proceeding in the usual manner, releases his hold of the left-hand paddle—both paddles are attached with cords to the

[1] If to carry a gun weighing not more than 80 lbs. the punt may be 17 ft. over all, and 16 ft. 3 in. on floor, other dimensions remaining identical.

gunwale—and uses the free hand to keep the aim of the gun true, while, with the right-hand paddle, he endeavours still further to decrease the distance between himself and the fowl. At the slightest sign of suspicion on the part of the birds he can, in still water, the trigger string being held in the left hand, take the shot instantly. If he reaches short range he abandons the second paddle and uses both hands to the gun. In shallow water the punt is propelled by pushing the paddles on the bottom.

A faster punt of the same class suitable for use on sheltered water, and carrying a gun from 60 lbs. to 70 lbs. weight, may be given the following proportions :—

	ft.	in.
Total length	17	5
Length on floor	16	8
Extreme width on floor . .	2	6
„ „ across decks .	2	10
Height of stem	0	5
„ „ stern	0	7½

We now come to a single-handed punt for sculling and using a setting-pole, to take a gun of from 80 lbs. to 120 lbs. weight :—

	ft.	in.
Total length	18	0
Length on floor	17	3
Extreme width on floor . .	2	9
„ „ across decks .	3	4

	ft.	in.
Height of stem	0	5½
„ „ stern	0	8
Length of fore-deck . . .	7	3
„ „ after-deck . . .	3	6
Greatest width of cockpit . .	2	2

If to carry a gun of not more than 100 lbs., the punt may be 2 inches less across decks, and 1 inch less across floor, other dimensions remaining the same.

This punt is propelled in deep water by an oar sculled in an after starboard rowing-spur, the gunner lying partly on the left side, and his arm passing through a shutter space in the coaming, and in shallows by means of a setting-pole, a short pole used to push against the bottom. Sculling a punt when setting up to fowl is not a favourite method with single-handed punt-gunners who shoot on sheltered waters—indeed in various respects it falls short ot the system of propulsion by paddles. When, however, the width of the punt runs beyond a certain limit, the stretch is too great for paddles to be used with effect, and sculling becomes necessary. The gunner can either fire with his left hand, or bring the handle of the oar inboard and use both hands to the gun. The following are the dimensions given for a punt of the same class in which it is only wished to carry a gun of from 70 lbs. to 80 lbs. :—

	ft.	in.
Total length	17	6
Length on floor	16	9
Extreme width of floor . .	2	8
„ „ across decks .	3	2
Height of stem	0	5
„ „ stern	0	8
Length of fore-deck . . .	7	0
„ „ after-deck . . .	3	0

When setting up to fowl in a double-handed punt, the puntsman, as the second man is called, lies on his left side and sculls an oar in a starboard spur when in deep water, and in shallows uses the setting-pole. Some fowlers advocate a rudder to a double-handed punt, but not, I think, very many; a puntsman worthy the name can keep an absolutely true course without one. The following are the dimensions given for:—

A double-handed punt, for paddling, sculling, or using a setting-pole, to take a gun of from 130 lbs. to 170 lbs. weight:—

	ft.	in.
Total length	22	5
Length on floor	22	0
Greatest width of floor . .	3	2
„ „ across decks .	3	11
Height of stem	0	5½
„ „ stern	0	8
Length of fore-deck . . .	8	3
„ „ after-deck . . .	4	2
Greatest width of cockpit . .	2	6

If required only for a gun weighing 130 lbs. or less, the length may be 21 ft. 8 in., the width of floor 2 ft. 10 in. and the width across deck 3 ft. 7 in., other dimensions remaining the same. The following is :—

A small double punt to take two fairly light men and a gun of from 80 lbs. to 100 lbs. :—

	ft.	in.
Total length	21	0
Length on floor	20	5
Floor at widest	3	0
Width across deck . . .	3	6
Height of stem	0	6
„ „ stern	0	7½
Length of fore-deck . . .	7	6
„ „ after-deck . . .	3	3

Light punts, in which not a few gunners like to knock about on the coast, for use with a heavy shoulder-gun, follow closely in most cases the dimensions long ago laid down by Colonel Hawker. These dimensions are :—

	ft.	in.
Length from stem to stern . .	14	0
„ at bottom . . .	13	4
Width amidships . . .	3	8
„ „ at bottom .	3	0
Depth at bow	0	7
„ astern	1	1
Spring fore and aft . . .	0	3½

This is a very safe punt for the coast, but of greater length and width of beam than are really necessary on sheltered water. It has a fore-deck, and coaming of ordinary height. Armed with a heavy double gun, which lies ready in rests on the deck, the wild-fowler may often do considerable execution.

When looking for fowl, a punt may be propelled either by oars or paddle—or of course may be sailed if the gunner cares for a sail and the wind allows. Paddling is preferable to rowing except against the current, as the position in the punt allows a constant look-out to be kept.

Not so very many years ago it was the almost universal custom to decry breech-loading swivel-guns. They were heavy, their shooting was not equal to that of muzzle-loaders of equal bore and length of barrel, there was no advantage in having a gun which could be charged more quickly than the muzzle-loader; they were very costly into the bargain, and being complicated they might very easily go wrong; whereas the muzzle-loader, simplicity itself, could never fail its user and would last him a lifetime. All this is still urged by many professional wild-fowlers. The breech-loading swivel-gun must always be costly compared with the muzzle-loader,

but objections on the score of weight and performance, however sound at one time, are no longer important; the modern breech-loader weighs but a trifle more than the muzzle-loader, and is fully equal to it in penetration. The claim that, as it makes no practical difference whether a punt-gun can be loaded in five seconds or five minutes, the breech-loader is only equal to the muzzle-loader is valid in a broad view of the fact that there are long intervals between shots on the water. But the broad view does not embrace the question of convenience. Every wild-fowler who has used a muzzle-loading swivel-gun knows what this means; the sponging-out process and its dirt, the drizzle interfering with everything, the difficulties set up by wind or swell. Then there is the drawing and changing of the shot-charge when, let us say, the gunner, about to launch a forlorn hope at brent, happens to descry a heavy bunch of teal lighting near at hand: the breech-loader possesses the very great advantage that when any kind of fowl are sighted the gunner can immediately and with no inconvenience insert a cartridge containing shot of a suitable size for use on that particular kind of fowl. Further, the ammunition of the breech-loader cannot be affected by wet, and its ignition under all circumstances is certain. By no sound reasoning can it now be main-

tained that the muzzle-loader is equal to the breech-loader.

A swivel-gun, according to the size of the punt and the quality of the sport to be expected, may be anything between a gun measuring 5 feet in the barrel, weighing 50 lbs. and firing a shot-charge of about 4 oz. to one weighing upwards of 200 lbs. with a 9 ft. 6 in. barrel, and capable of shooting 40 oz. of shot with safety and high penetration. A gun which can readily be used in either a single-handed or a light double-handed punt may be a 1½-in. bore firing up to 1½ lb. of shot. Such a gun is powerful enough for any sport the wild-fowler is likely to encounter on our coasts in these days. The length of the barrel is a little less than 8 feet, the total weight about 100 lbs. A light single-handed punt may be equipped with a 1¼-in. gun—firing a shot-charge of from ¾ lb. to 1¼ lb. Messrs J. and W. Tolley make a particularly handy and effective gun—bore a fraction over 1 inch, weight 50 lbs., barrel 5 feet—for use on a fast punt. Large guns for double-handed punts are usually 2-in. bores. Double-barrelled swivel-guns deserve everything that has ever been said in their favour, but they are heavy and very costly and are seldom used.

The wild-fowler has small scope for choice in

the mounting and breeching of his swivel-gun. There is little, if any, practical difference. A swivel-gun mounted in the simplest style—as the very large majority of guns are—lies in a plain crutch, the shank of which turns in a socket in the gun-beam, a curved beam at the after-end of the fore-deck. The elevation of the gun is regulated to the requirements of the shot by means of the gun-rest, which is pushed forwards or drawn towards the gunner according to whether the gun needs laying with less or greater elevation. The gun-rest, like a cue-rest in form, has a head measuring about 8 inches across, the head being flat on the top and having two semicircular cavities cut in the under-part. These cavities fit over the breeching ropes, so that the barrel can be moved from side to side on the rest. The breeching rope passes through a hole in the stem of the punt, and its looped ends are then fitted over the trunnions. The gun is so balanced in its crutch that the gunner can instantly and without effort tip it with one hand for a flying shot. A downward pull of about 6 lbs. on the stock should balance a loaded gun in the crutch. An elevating gear is largely used, and is at certain times a great convenience, as it enables the gunner to take a shot over intercepting ground which could not be taken without it. The boot-jack system

of taking up the recoil of a swivel-gun is much written about and not much used. It is satisfactory in the case of guns firing small charges—say up to ¾ lb. of shot, but it can scarcely be said to possess advantages balancing its disadvantages.

The different sizes of shot for use in swivel-guns are an important consideration; for obviously a charge which will do the best possible on, for instance, a paddling of mallard will fail as suitable shot to use on a bunch of teal. The following (Newcastle sizes) give good, if not the highest, attainable results.

For teal	No. 2
For all duck except teal . .	B.
If wild	B.B.
For brent	B.B.
If wild	A.A.
For other geese . . .	A.A.
If wild	S.S.S.G.

Special powder of coarse grain is used in punt-guns.

Though it is impossible by any amount of writing to give a man the knowledge requisite for successful punt-gunning—this can only be acquired by long observation and experience—still it is within the power of a scribe to point out certain things on which to a large extent success depends.

When purposing to set up to fowl, the gunner must assume the prone position before coming near enough to run any risk of giving the birds alarm before he begins to set up to them. In the matter of distance no rule can be laid down; so much depends upon circumstances. With practice the fowler will know almost instinctively by the look of the birds when he has reached a point beyond which it would be unwise to go; he may keep on his seat till within 600 yards or so, or he may consider it necessary to lie down when double that distance away. Cutting things too fine is often a fruitful source of disappointment to gunners whose experiences afloat have not been many. Fowl should be approached across wind if possible; if it then becomes necessary to take a flying shot, the birds, rising against the wind, will offer more vulnerable targets than would be the case if they rose at or from the gun, and a larger proportion of clean kills will result.

Power to gauge distance correctly, or even approximately, from the low position of a gunner prone in his punt can only be acquired by considerable experience. A beginner is likely enough to imagine birds to be only sixty yards away—and to fire at them—when they are nearly double that distance

from the muzzle of his gun. Distance is always much underestimated by beginners, who should keep this fact constantly in mind.

The extreme range at which it is fair or sportsmanlike to fire at fowl is a question on which wildfowlers hold widely varying opinions. Plenty of amateurs—with more money than sense perhaps—fire when no professional would think of doing so. They wound and gather a bird or two from time to time, and I suppose they are satisfied with their sport and with themselves. A hundred yards range is usually considered not unsportsmanlike where competition exists and when heavy shot is used. When free or moderately free from competition, it is bad policy to indulge in a shot at such a range, as a better chance is likely to be had at the same birds later on. Individually, I consider that eighty yards represents the extreme range at which it is wise to fire when competition is small. An eighty yards range yields plenty of cripples as a rule. One of seventy yards gives vastly more satisfactory results. The ideal range for a swivel-gun is sixty yards. As this means a deadly killing circle, anything shorter is undesirable. The gunner having reached what he is pleased to consider extreme range, holds himself —endeavouring of course to work his punt still nearer

—in readiness to fire the instant the fowl raise their heads. A delay of a second here may mean the difference between a good shot and a very poor one, or, perhaps, a clean miss. The birds spring upwards at the discharge, and their wings are open or opening when the shot reaches them. It is interesting to note, by the way, that, when it acted perfectly, the old flint-lock gun was a better gun on sitting fowl than is the modern breech-loader or percussion muzzle-loader, pattern and penetration being equal; the greater delay between the fall of the hammer and the passage of the shot from the muzzle meant that the birds, springing at the flash, met the shot when they were well off the water and had their wings fully extended. Many of these old guns were 2-in. bores or thereabouts, 10 feet in the barrel, and of enormous weight, such weight that it required two or three men to work them. A shot should never be taken at fowl—this does not apply to teal—when they are sitting quietly and unaware of the presence of the punt, for if this is done their wings and feathers will be lying close at the time of the impact of the pellets. On the other hand, let the gunner, having reached ideal range, keep his aim true, tap gently with his foot on the floor of the punt, and fire as the birds raise their heads. It is not

to be supposed from all this that putting in a well-aimed shot from a swivel-gun is an easy thing; as a matter of fact it is a very difficult one. Just a few further words in conclusion of the subject of firing.

One constantly sees it stated by the parrots of wild-fowling literature that when a bunch of teal is descried the gunner has the almost certainty of a rare shot before him. True, teal are the easiest of all duck to approach. But then it is equally true that when once teal have sprung, the gunner's chance, unless he has both hands at the gun, of placing the charge as it ought to be placed is a small one at the best. Brent give ample time when they rise at a sudden alarm; widgeon and mallard give fair time for the expert fowler; teal are up and off like a flash of lightning; and I believe—though my belief may be hopelessly wrong of course—that 90 per cent. at least of gunners who have had all-round experience on salt water could narrate disastrous teal experiences if they cared to do so: something like this: a dense bunch of teal, a hope amounting almost to a certainty of killing forty at the least, a further hope to lessen the range by a dozen yards, a moment of utter bewilderment, a charge put in feet below the rising birds, a bag of—absolutely nil, and a very bad attack of rumination afterwards. When you are within

anything like comfortable range of teal, let them have it as they sit, and this without a moment's delay.

Having made his shot the gunner should, just for a brief time, keep an eye on the birds which have escaped the charge, in case there may be any droppers, which can be looked for and probably gathered a few minutes later. Then he must set to work briskly on the cripples, shooting each bird at short range and picking it up then and there. The birds killed by the swivel-gun can be gathered when the cripples have been accounted for, and the fowler can then proceed in search of any dropper or droppers he has marked down. Whether the shot has been on mud or water, let the liveliest cripples, those which are making their way most quickly from the scene of the shot, be attended to first. Should the birds be on the ooze, mud-boards must be worn. The beginner should be careful how he travels in these, as a fall is a nasty, and may even be a dangerous, thing. Place one foot fairly and squarely on the mud before raising the other, and never let haste or excitement prompt any departure from this rule.

Just a word on the wild-fowling 'centre.' A beginner seeking information is almost invariably advised to visit some widely known or much-

advertised resort and there to try his luck—some town or village on a part of the coast where there are mud and *zostera*, and therefore where brent and widgeon congregate. The advice is good so far as it goes; the fowler will find birds there. But he will find them practically unapproachable. He will also find punts out of all proportion to the extent of the water within his reach—those of the professionals, men who make their winter living, or some of it, by wild-fowling, those of the resident sportsmen, those of the men who keep their outfit on the spot and run down from town or elsewhere at any time when they hear that birds are being shot. Together the owners of these punts form an army among whom the tiro is likely to do very little good in the way of sport, though he may, but this only during exceptional weather, fare well enough if he employs a professional as puntsman and pays him highly for his services. Nor does the new comer always find things very pleasant for him, unless he has plenty of money, and is prepared to throw it about.

It is impossible to blame local men, men to whom fowl mean bread and cheese, for resenting the presence of strangers, or for doing what they can to spoil their sport. Their own sport is often spoilt by people who come for a week or two, apparently for

the mere purpose of ridding themselves of powder and shot, and fire at anything and everything at well-nigh any and every range. In an estuary, a much recommended resort, where during the last week of the 1904–5 season I am scribbling these words, the arrival of the sport-spoiling stranger is of painful frequency. Of course there are all sorts of opinions regarding the ethics of wild-fowling, a subject which might be argued for an age. The practical side of what I would say is this: that, if one be bent on sport and nothing else, it is infinitely better to avoid a 'centre,' where only odds and ends are to be picked up; to explore likely parts of the coast for one's self—not necessarily very much out-of-the-way parts—and then to select one's quarters and establish one's outfit there.

Having done this, one should chum in heartily with what few local men there may be, and show them every consideration. It all more than pays in the long run. A study of the Ordnance Survey maps will reveal likely parts of the coast—parts marked with stretches of mudflats or saltings—where on account of their distance from any town or large village the explorer may light on some cosy little beat, free from material competition. On punt-ridden parts of the shore duck and brent are very

different from what they were a couple of generations ago. They have been educated with a vengeance. Far better, if the gunner's pocket will stand it, than land quarters, is to make a home of a sufficiently roomy—roomy enough for himself, his man, and a boy—sailing craft, of as light draft as is consistent with safety. Much weary trudging, and waiting, and shivering in the punt is avoided by the gunner who makes his quarters afloat; while, besides this, he can move up and down the coast, according to circumstances.

A thorough and extensive knowledge of his locality is necessary before the gunner can hope to do the best that is to be done there. He must know just at what time the different feeding-grounds are covered, whether there will be water enough to float him up to a certain bank at a certain state of the tide when approached from a certain point, and so on. All this makes an immense amount of difference to his prospects of sport, for the fowler who knows every yard of his beat knows also not only where birds are likely to be found, but also just the time when he ought to be on the spot. It is an extremely good plan to build up from day to day a map, on a large scale, outlining all the higher grounds of the shore embraced in his range, filling in as they become

known particulars as to their state at any time of the tide. Brief reference thereto—after consulting a local tide-table, covering the season, which he has been wise enough to calculate and commit to cardboard—will show the gunner where his best prospects lie at any time of the day he feels disposed to launch his punt.

As concerns shooting fowl on their feeding-grounds, punting on an ebb tide is nearly always a failure. Birds are hard to approach; if the gunner does manage to obtain a shot, he may find the water leaving the ground so fast that the punt will be left should he attempt to gather the birds. The best time to begin trying for a shot is at the first of the flood. Fowl being seen, the gunner should set up to them the moment he feels assured that there will be water enough to float him within range; not before, for if he grounds, he is likely enough to lose the shot. The heaviest shots are generally made just before the tide covers the last of the feeding-ground. If the fowler be free from competition, it is often—that is when the birds are loosely bunched—best to refrain from setting up to them till that time. On most parts of the coast where brent and widgeon feed, however, the policy of taking the first decent chance that offers itself is a wise one. Should fowl

which at any time take alarm before the gunner comes within range light again at some point within his reach, it is advisable to give them a long rest before making a second attempt to secure a shot, unless there be the probability of another punt putting in an appearance. Dawn, other things being equal, gives the fowler a better chance than does any other time of the day. The higher the wind, the less difficult are fowl to approach, but at the same time the more difficult is it to put in a well-aimed shot.

Anyone wishing to make himself a salt-water duck-shooter will be wise if before the fowl begin to arrive he makes an opportunity of practising for a few weeks with punt and swivel-gun. He can thereby acquire useful experience in judging range; he can drill himself with paddle and pole till he finds his craft come well to hand—if one may use such a term in an aquatic connection—while a bit of a wind will give him means of acquiring under safe circumstances a pretty good idea as to how much sea it is to be expected to stand without undue risk; he can load with reduced charges, reduced both in bulk and in the size of the pellets, and train hand and eye with sitting, rising, and occasional flying, shots at the waders. Probably the chance of killing a few

mallard will also fall to his lot. If he can persuade an experienced man to give him some practical lessons in handling the punt it will be considerably to his advantage.

I will conclude this chapter with a briefly descriptive survey of the ordinary outfit of a gunner in his punt.

Cripple-stopper. This should be a full choke 12-bore, preferably with double-grip action. Let it not be a gun the appearance of which is valued. It is a good plan to have two brass hooks under the side deck, to hold the cripple-stopper and keep it out of harm's way. Cripple-stopper cartridges should be waterproof, and should be loaded with No. 4 or No. 5 shot. Let the cartridge-bag have a strap to buckle round the waist; if carried by means of a strap passing over the shoulder, it will prove a constant nuisance when birds are being gathered on the ooze. There should be a cleaning rod for the cripple-stopper.

Mud-boards. Boards to strap or lash to the feet, enabling the wearer to walk over ooze which would not otherwise bear his weight. They should be made of wood $\frac{3}{4}$-in. thick. Length 14 inches, width 11 inches is a convenient size. To the under-surface of each mud-board should be firmly fixed by rivets a

cross made of lengths of hard wood, oak for preference, about ¾-in. square. This prevents slipping. Elm is the best wood for mud-boards.

Small anchor, with plenty of line, which may be used as a towing-line when one is required.

Setting-pole. Length from 5 feet to 8 feet. The setting-pole should have a forked metal head—this offering increased resistance—of weight sufficient, or sufficiently weighted with lead, to keep it on the bottom. Some fowlers carry two setting-poles of different lengths.

Cleaning-rod and breech-brush for swivel-gun if a breech-loader, or if a muzzle-loader cleaning and loading-rod combined, with screw top for drawing charge, and powder spoon to screw to rod. A powder spoon is used for conveying the powder charge down the barrel when it is inconvenient on account of the weather or the weight of the weapon to tip up the gun for loading. The powder is sent home by a sudden jerk when the spoon nears the breech end.

Plug for muzzle of swivel-gun and waterproof cover for breech.

Water- and rust-proof box for cartridges if the gun be a breech-loader; or for ammunition and loading and cleaning appliances if a muzzle-loader;

inter alia, powder and shot both done up in charges so that the trouble of measuring is dispensed with, waterproof caps, flask of small-grain powder for priming, thick felt and card wads, and oakum for cleaning out barrel, and, if wished, to take the place of the felt wads. Wadding over powder: stout card, and then three half-inch felt wads, or the equivalent in oakum of the felt.

Another water- and rust-proof box for cripple-stopper cartridges and sundries, including compass and powerful field-glass.

Cork-stuffed cushion to serve as a seat when rowing, as a rest for the left arm when sculling to fowl, and for the chest when paddling, and as a life-buoy in case of emergency. Instead of cork, the cushion may be stuffed with reindeer hair, the cover being thoroughly waterproofed with paint or varnish.

Rowing-spurs; not fixed rowlocks, which are noisy. The shanks of the spurs, about 9 inches long, pass through holes in the side-decks, and fit into blocks of wood fixed below. The punt should have a movable foot-bar for rowing.

A small mop, indispensable for cleaning up after a shot; and a stout sack to be spread on the floor when setting up, and to carry fowl from punt to home.

If a single-handed punt, a pair of short paddles for setting up (length of blade, 20 inches; length of handle, 7 inches or 8 inches; width of blade, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches or $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches); a long single paddle or a double paddle (a double paddle should be fitted with leather collars to check water running down from the blades); and a pair of oars; or—

A pair of oars, one being used to scull when setting up, and double paddle or long single paddle. An oar used for sculling to fowl must have a long band of leather to prevent any sound in the spur. Measurements of useful single paddle: length of blade 27 inches, width of blade $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches, length of handle 45 inches. A double paddle should be not less than 11 feet long. An extra oar is often carried by way of precaution against accident.

Mast and sail if desired; rudder if desired. The mast passes through a non-rusting metal mast-band fixed to the gun-beam, and is held in position by a step on the floor boards.

CHAPTER II

SHOOTING THE DUCK INLAND AND ON THE SHORE

LET us begin by noticing the different devices employed by the duck shooter as means to enable him to outwit his quarry. Of these the most common and the most effective is the pit or gun-hole.

The object of the gunner in sinking a pit is to be able to hide the whole of his body below the level of the surface of the ground. The area of the pit should be about 4 feet by 3 feet. After excavating to a depth at which the eyes of the occupant, when he is sitting, will be just above the surface, continue to take out earth from about two-thirds of the oblong only, the further excavation being made to accommodate the legs and feet of the gunner. In the extreme forepart of the pit there should be a yet deeper cavity—a well into which water may drain, and from which it may be baled when necessary; a piece of board put over this well is a

convenience. A waterproof mat must be placed upon the seat before the pit is occupied. The excavated matter should be scattered in all directions, and the surface of the land made to show as little sign as possible of having been disturbed. A good deal depends upon the observance or non-observance of this precaution. The foregoing applies to a pit made in a bare situation. When sedge or marram, or other growth of some kind exists near at hand, the pit, its depth proportionately less, may be roughly fringed with it. There should be dry straw or litter for the feet to rest upon. When one wishes to use a pit constantly it is a good plan to have the sides roughly boarded and a plank fixed for the seat. On the shore a pit should be so dug that the gunner sits with his face towards the sea. A fowler of enterprise will have, on a flat foreshore, a certain number of pits in a line at right angles with the sea, so that whatever the state of the tide he can always take up a desirable position, retreating to a more landward pit as the flowing water threatens to flood the one he occupies, or baling out and ensconcing himself in a more seaward hiding-place as the tide ebbs.

The use of decoy ducks is probably a device as old as the art of wild-fowling itself. Decoys in

our own day may be either natural or artificial. Though live birds are probably much the better, few gunners care to take the trouble entailed by using them. Of the different artificial decoys none is so attractive as the simple wooden model carefully painted to resemble the plumage of the bird—the only recommendation of flat decoys is their portability; but as half a dozen of the other kind can be comfortably carried in a bag slung over one's shoulder, this does not count for much. Not fewer than three decoys, preferably double that number, should be used, and they should be anchored within a yard or so of one another. Decoys sometimes prove very killing in hard weather when duck are being kept on the move in the district. The gunner is, of course, concealed in his pit or blind. He should have if possible two guns at hand, and if, as they ought to be, his decoys are within twenty yards of him, he will not so very infrequently have the opportunity of using all four charges. Decoys may often be made to do good service at flight-time when the birds come in early, or when there is a moon. During light nights they will frequently serve the bag well if used on a pool on the saltings.

A blind, to be fully effective, must approximate

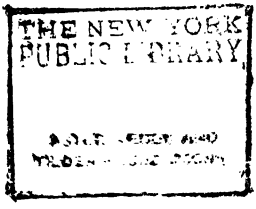
to the natural surroundings in appearance. Where any tall growth exists a triangular enclosure made by lashing rough cross-pieces of wood to the three uprights—the growth being then interlaced—constitutes a good blind, and one that may be made in a short time. Should a patch of short rush or sedge be available the gunner may dig a pit of sufficient depth in the patch, leaving a fringe of growth between himself and the decoys. Individual ingenuity has wide scope for asserting itself in the planning and construction of blinds, and extreme precautions to ensure invisibility rarely mean waste of time.

When punting after duck on fresh water I never fail to do so under cover of a blind. Round the bows, and one side of the punt or boat—small staples may be fixed for the purpose—should be run two pieces of tightly stretched stout copper wire, about 3 inches apart; between these wires and the punt, sedge or rush is then fixed till a low rough screen results. Dropping down stream in a screened punt at day-dawn good sport may often be had. It is necessary to hug the bank with the unscreened side of the punt. A heavy as well as a light shoulder gun should be carried. Avoid as far as possible coming down on duck direct; keep a course which

will take you by the birds at the desired range. Shooting from a heavily screened boat—known as a sneak-boat—is widely and successfully practised in America. Another device adopted in America, where extent of water and abundance of fowl make it, like the sneak-boat, a serviceable means of filling the bag, is known as the sink-box. This is a floating platform or raft with a long shallow box, the top of which is on a level with the platform, in the middle. On the platform, which is painted to resemble the water as seen from above, are fixed ten or a dozen decoys. The position of the sportsman in the box may be that of one in a punt, or he can turn on his back and kill the birds coming over him.

The white overall is a device with which the duck shooter who wishes for success cannot dispense when a covering of snow lies on the ground. It is also serviceable during the time of a thick mist. The overall is made of linen, after the pattern of an ordinary nightshirt. At the sides it should have slits through which the wearer can reach his pockets and cartridge-belt, while at the level of the hips and knees there should be sewn pieces of tape, which, when the overall is on, may be so tied that, though free movement of limb is allowed, the superfluous material cannot flutter about on the wind. The

A SCREENED PUNT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gunner's head must also be covered with white. I have found a covering made in the shape of a child's sun-bonnet, with an opening only large enough to expose the eyes, nose, and mouth, the most convenient thing. It is, of course, worn over the cap.

Clad thus in white (I wrote a few years ago) amid the white surroundings, one—if motionless—is practically invisible to the passing fowl. Rarely will the wariest bird detect the trick which is being played upon him till he has come within comfortable range. Were you to throw up a rough heap of snow and stick into it the upper part of a human face—just the eyes and nose—the piece of face would look very strange to you; if you had never seen a human face at close quarters before, the piece of it in the snow would look far stranger still. When gulls catch sight of it, it appears to them just about the oddest thing any bird could imagine. They cannot make it out at all. Some are inquisitive to a degree. I have had a gull circling round and round me for minutes at a stretch, and when I have winked at him it has only served as a spur to his curiosity. A hooded crow sometimes shows equal inquisitiveness, but greater caution. His prying circumambiency over, he sits down, perhaps fifteen yards away, and stares at you. At length it suddenly flashes upon his corvine brain that there is something uncanny about the lump of snow with a piece of face sticking in it, and he takes a rapid and remarkably flustered departure.

The stalking-horse, or cow, will, under certain circumstances, give the gunner a chance of approaching

duck in an open situation. It is made by constructing a rough framework in the form of a grazing horse, which is then covered with coarse canvas, this being painted to resemble the animal. The tail and mane are made of real horse-hair. The frame has two legs only, and stands with the support of a swing prop when the gunner pauses to fire. A hole is cut in the canvas, through which the sportsman may see, and through which sitting shots may be taken. Slings to support a heavy shoulder-gun, as well as a light gun, may be attached to the inner side of the framework. Circumspection and slowness of movement are necessary for successful stalking. The gunner should never attempt to approach the birds directly, but, as though he meant to pass them, should take a line which will bring him just within range. It may be remarked that in a wind the stalking-horse is very difficult to manage, and that its use is then more likely to be followed by disaster than success. Personally I have never thought much of the stalking-horse, except as a means of approaching on rough land. Given a fairly smooth surface, the creeping-carriage is an infinitely better contrivance for stealing a march on fowl in the open.

The creeping-carriage is a low, long structure, running on small—say, 12-in.—wheels, the tyres of

which should be wide. According to my own opinion, the most satisfactory form of creeping-carriage is that in which the occupant, resting the weight of the fore-part of his body on a cross-board, propels himself with his knees, instead of lying at full length on a platform and using his feet as means of propulsion. The recommendations of the knee-propelled carriage are: that it may be more readily steered than the carriage in which the gunner lies at full length and works with his feet; that more rapid and more easy progress may be made; that, as the occupant can relieve it of practically all his weight, uneven pieces of ground can be crossed with far less difficulty; and that, for the purpose more especially of taking the best advantage of an unexpected shot, which may offer better prospects than one at the small lot of fowl he is stalking, he can release himself in a second by simply remaining on his knees and thrusting the carriage forward.

For a man of medium height and build the framework of the creeping-carriage may be, roughly, 5 ft. 6 in. long, 2 ft. 6 in. wide, and 2 ft. high. There must be no bottom cross-piece at the rear to interfere with the leg movements of the gunner. The wheels should be inside the framework. In the forepart of the carriage, fixed at, or just above,

the level of the axles, there must be a cross-board not less than 12 inches wide, on which the sportsman places his arms. This board ought to be well padded, or the arms will suffer at once. It is perhaps unnecessary to say that one must use stout knee-pads, unless leather wading-boots are worn. Along the sides, front, and top of the carriage are tightly-stretched strands of strong copper wire, between which the growth which is to screen the occupant may be interlaced. The growth used should be, or should closely resemble, that of the scene of operations. Do not screen the carriage heavily, and do not arrange the growth to come an inch higher than is necessary. There may be slings inside the framework to carry a heavy gun. A creeping-carriage such as I have described, having but little weight to support, can be very slightly built, and is thus easily carried long distances if the gunner hitches it over his shoulder.

One's muscles soon become trained to the prone position and the creeping movements. The use of the creeping-carriage is often a deadly device if the gunner acts with judgment and caution. On a quite bare coast, screen the carriage lightly with hanging seaweed; never move while a bird's head is in the air; be prepared to devote an hour to one stalk.

Consider background more than wind: you have a better chance if you come down wind with just a patch or two of sedge or marram behind you than if you come up wind with nothing but bare land at the rear.

The question of guns and ammunition for the purpose of shooting the duck inland is a wide one, and one into which individual bias must enter to a large extent.

A great deal, of course, depends upon the conditions under which one is shooting. If punting on river, broad or mere, a single 4-bore or a double 8-bore must be considered highly desirable as a supplement to the light shoulder-gun. Cartridges for the heavy gun should be loaded, some with No. 1 and some with B.B.—London sizes, or their Newcastle equivalent—the latter being used for shots at extreme ranges. Let the heavy gun be of the fullest possible choke. A heavy gun is also a desirable weapon to have with one when shooting over decoys, or when lying up at dawn or dusk in a position commanding a pool frequented by the birds. Generally speaking, it may be said that, save in the connections thus outlined, the heavy shoulder-gun does not stand as a weapon that can be put to more than very little practical use by the inland duck-shooter, though, of

course, there come many moments when he wishes he held such a gun in his hands instead of the 12-bore or light 10-bore which he carries.

My own best work among duck inland and on the shore has been done with a 12-bore, full choke in both barrels, chambered to take the 3-in. brass case, and regulated to shoot the short paper-case charge as well—and experience has convinced me that, if he has the gift of holding fairly straight, a gun of this type is the most satisfactory that a duck-shooter can carry. The gun should weigh about 8 lbs.—over rather than under—for the shoulder needs saving before the arm. With a load of 1¾ oz. of shot the gun is equal in performance to any 10-bore one can carry comfortably, while with the ordinary paper case and load it is equivalent to a modified choke game-gun, pattern about 170. The variety of charges one can use in this gun prepares the duck-shooter for practically every need. With a game charge of No. 6 in the right barrel and 1½ oz. or 1¾ oz. of No. 4 in the left, he is ready to make certain of a teal at forty yards or a mallard at sixty. If a bunch of teal are marked down in the stream, he can attend to them with No. 6 in both barrels; if mallard are likely to be found in that favourite rushy pool, or if duck are about in the creeks by the shore, his loads of

1¾ oz. of No. 4 or No. 3 put him on excellent terms with them; if a bunch of birds is coming high over him he can rattle 3½ oz. of Newcastle No. 1 or London No. 2 into their line of flight; or, if on the shore the most careful stalking fails to bring him within eighty yards of a gathering of fowl, and there is no chance that they will work nearer to him, his 3½ oz., or even 4 oz., of London No. 1 or Newcastle B.B. well placed will often do satisfactory execution.

From my own experience and tests I recommend soft shot before chilled when any size larger than No. 4 is used. I advise the gunner always to load his brass cases himself. The leading smokeless powders now perform so well in heavy charges that there remains no excuse for using black powder in shoulder-guns. The different makers will always give advice about loading when particulars as to the bore and weight of the gun and the length of the case are placed before them. Cases which wet will affect should never be used. A sling, enabling the wild-fowler to carry his gun slung round his shoulder, and freeing him from all necessity of ever laying it down in the wet, is an immense convenience under many circumstances. One's fellows are generally inclined to let loose plenty of chaff when they

criticise the contrivance, which certainly is somewhat suggestive of a Sunday expedition in search of *gibier*. The laugh, however, is on the other side when the man with the sling has both hands free to help him in surmounting the rough side of a creek or other obstacles, or to carry home his game, or to put comfortably away in his pockets during long spells of inactive waiting, or when he is able to relieve his arms in a moment from the weight which is beginning to tell upon them.

Scarcely less important to the duck-shooter than the question of gun and ammunition is that of clothing. First, he must be clad to resist wet and cold. Flannel—unequalled among wearing material for lightness and warmth combined—and plenty of it, should serve for all under-garments and for the lining of all outer ones, these being preferably of waterproof tweed. Linen anywhere on the body is an abomination. When punting, or when the sportsman will have much waiting about, a fisherman's jersey of the heaviest kind should be worn over the shirt. A cashmere scarf should take the place of a collar. In wet weather, unless one be walking, oil-skins should be worn, and the cap should have a waterproof covering. Well-oiled leather boots are more satisfactory in every way than india-rubber

ones, except on the score of weight. To the wild-fowler who fails to keep his body dry Nature is certain to present an unpleasant account sooner or later. Spirits do not stave off cold, but induce it.

Secondly, the duck-shooter must remember that his success among duck depends very largely upon the precautions he takes in order to match the shade of his clothing with that of the background against which the birds will see him, and that the less conspicuous he is the better will be his prospects of making a bag. Trouble taken by the wild-fowler to render himself inconspicuous is never trouble wasted. If you fancy one shade of cloth may, perhaps, be too light to blend with natural tints, and another perhaps too dark, choose the lighter one. To screen the face effectively it is an excellent plan to carry a veil made of fine mosquito net to cover the entire head, the material being dyed to the desired shade. There should be openings in it for the eyes and mouth.

It may be remarked that, by night as well as by day, duck are not so very infrequently put on their guard by a flash of light glinting from the gun-barrels, a shot being thus lost. Few men care to disfigure, even temporarily, the barrels of a shoulder gun; but those who do so by painting them a suitable

colour are on distinctly more favourable terms with duck than they would be if their barrels carried a surface gloss. The old Norfolk fowlers used purposely to rust their gun-barrels on this account, and in times of snow to cover them with whitening. What guns those fen wild-fowlers carried! The 'handful' served as the shot-measure when loading. Little is it to be wondered at, considering the standing belief that a gun was only properly loaded when at its discharge the gunner could just hold it and just remain on his feet, that the bursting of these weapons should have been comparatively common. Magnificent shots were often made at flight-time and by night. In some of the villages bordering the marshes of Norfolk the men were duck-shooters almost without exception. Haddiscoe is a notable example. There, some sixty or seventy years ago, the whole village, headed by the parson, would turn out at flight-time and scatter themselves over the marshes.

Some of the fowlers (says a local chronicler, Mr. Last Farman, when writing on the village in question, a few years back), can be seen at the present day carrying scars imprinted fifty years ago. In these days of overloading it was nothing unusual to find the old shooting-iron standing bolt-upright like a telegraph pole in the soft, boggy soil at the rear of the sportsman's prostrated form. . . . The

bursting of these old guns was not a very rare occurrence, and some of the gunners yet survive, minus a finger or two and with sundry scratches through these mishaps. Sometimes a fowler would imbibe a drop or two too much, and whilst sitting on his little square board, in spite of the cold, Morpheus would get the upper hand of him. One tells the tale of going to sleep in this fashion, and waking up and somewhat recovering his senses at the hour of midnight, the ducks making merry within a few yards of his shivering carcass, and he almost too numb with cold to put himself in walking position. No wonder rheumatism showed up so prominently in the old duck-shooter of fifty years ago. . . . Other incidents yet cling to the mind of the grey-headed fowler, such as falling into a ditch or through the ice, or losing himself on the marsh on a foggy night, there to tramp about till daylight appeared and relieved his troubled mind and aching limbs, the accidental shooting of a fellow fighter in mistake for something better, and other items too numerous to mention.

If the gunner be on land, he should visit as early in the day as possible all those parts of his beat which are most likely to be disturbed, bearing in mind that when once a mallard is on the wing the chances of seeing him again that day are not great. Stealthiness and caution should be the watchwords of the duck-shooter; his guiding principle should be never to study comfort or convenience, for if he does so, in whatever branch of wild-fowling he may be engaged, his sport will suffer to some extent. As the birds are

few and far between, no single precaution must be neglected when there is the possibility of obtaining a shot, and the sportsman must be so clad that no consideration for his clothing shall weigh with him. That pond or pool, full well-nigh to the brim after heavy winter rains, and devoid of any screening growth, may hold a couple of mallard, or perhaps a teal or two. Should the gunner approach them as he would walk up a covey of partridges, his prospect of a shot is a shady one indeed; but if, being wisely clothed, he creeps till within range, the birds will be his. Or, again, there may be duck on the river or stream; should the gunner show himself they will be lost to him, but if he stalks and prospects, and, having located his quarry, makes a *détour* and drags himself to the most advantageous point, his labours will once more be rewarded.

If the duck-shooter first goes over his ground in this manner, and afterwards allows his dog to work through all the rushes and other cover, he will have done everything it is possible to do to ensure success. He should never be without a good glass, whether he is walking after his birds or shooting on the water. I like to carry a glass, without its case, in a wash-leather-lined pocket high up on the inner left-hand side of the coat. It is out of harm's way

there, and can be handled in a moment—and when one can make out duck through a glass, one is already half-way on the road to success. For portability, convenience, and effectiveness combined, there is nothing equal to a 12-power prismatic monocular. The daylight duck-shooter should keep a constant watch for birds on the wing, a thing which practice leads him to do almost instinctively. If duck be seen coming towards him, he should take cover instantly, or, failing cover, throw himself on his back, snatching a handful of herbage or litter to cover his face, and then hiding his hands. He must not stir a muscle till he springs up to take his shot. Should duck not be seen until they are within a few hundred yards, it is better to stand motionless than to stoop or lie down.

The duck-shooter on the shore does not often expect sport by day except during hard frost or while there is a gale—for, in still, open weather the birds will be securely resting at sea—though now and again, of course, one may find a duck or two in the creeks. When frost has lasted long enough to close inland waters, the birds being then driven to the shore for their livelihood, he may often have capital sport if he engages in the rough work of walking the creeks, or if he stalks or lies in wait for his quarry by the fringe

of the tide. Some of the most delightful sport I have ever had has been among duck on the shore during a prolonged frost. One should start the day at dawn. When a gale is raging the duck-shooter must hasten to take advantage of his opportunity, knowing that the birds, finding things too turbulent for them at sea, will be sheltering on the lee-side of the estuaries and scattered about the creeks and other waters near the coast. A gale not only brings duck within reach of the shore-shooter, but also renders them much more easy of approach than when the weather is still. A time for which the duck-shooter should be especially on the look-out is that of a thaw following a spell of hard frost. The birds will then flock to their favourite feeding-grounds, which the frost has kept closed, and feed ravenously for just a few hours—so ravenously that, their ordinary caution being in abeyance, the gunner has little or no difficulty in bringing himself within range.

It is the habit of surface-feeding duck to pass the day at sea or in some secure inland retreat, and to visit their feeding-places at night, the brief period which they spend in making the journeys to and fro being known as flight-time. It is at flight-time that the duck-shooter ashore has, as a rule, the cream of his sport.

To achieve success at flight-time, the sportsman must closely study his ground and the habits of the birds. Let me give two or three examples, which are well worth the necessary space. There is a stretch of country over which the gunner has liberty to range. To the partridge-shooter, who is at home when flight-time begins, and who takes no practical interest in wild-fowling, the district, as concerns duck, tells nothing. For the duck-shooter, however, there may be much to learn. He wanders over the stubbles in search of traces of his quarry. At last he finds a feather, unmistakably the feather of a mallard. Further examination reveals further evidence: duck feed there. Accordingly he makes a pit or blind, and at flight-time meets with his reward. The nearest water is a field-corner pond. Here also feathers are found, proving that duck use the water after feeding, and warranting the gunner in his conclusion that sport will be had if at a suitable time he conceals himself in a position commanding the water. If the flight-shooter's stand is to be in the track of the birds, that is, at some point between their daytime resting-place and their feeding-ground, he must ascertain by experience what lines are taken by them. On any mile of shore there are always, according to my own experience, just one or two spots over which at flight-time

the incoming birds are much more likely to pass than over any other part of the mile; if the gunner takes steps to discover these spots he will have far better luck than if he acted at haphazard. When the flight-shooter is preparing to wait for birds on their feeding-ground, let him bear in mind that whatever may be the point of the compass from which they have reached the locality, duck will always come into the feeding-ground up-wind, and that to take the fullest advantage of his situation he must have the wind at his back while watching for them. When flighting for widgeon on the shore the same rule should be observed if there is anything more than a gentle breeze blowing; if the air be still it is better to face the tide. Let the flight-shooter also remember that in wild weather duck move earlier—sometimes much earlier—than when the weather is still.

Opinions differ widely as to the kind of gun and the size of shot which should be used for flight-shooting. One of the most successful flight-shooters I have ever known, a man who made his winter living by wild-fowling, invariably arms himself with a 12-bore double cylinder and $1\frac{1}{8}$ oz. of No. 6 shot. Myself, I have done the best work with a full-choke 12-bore, using either $1\frac{1}{4}$ oz. of No. 5, or $1\frac{1}{2}$ oz. of No. 4, according to the light. A good deal depends

upon the shooting capabilities of the sportsman and the degree of light in which he shoots. If a man is an average shot he is, no doubt, better off with a full-choke gun in his hands when the light is good, or moderately good, and with a cylinder when the light is bad. But for all-round use at flight-time, nothing equals the heavy 12-bore I have already described. Armed with such a gun, the flight-shooter can use heavy charges of large shot when birds are coming in high from the sea. Abundant practice is necessary before one can become a really good flight-shot. Often the light is so uncertain that only the merest glimpse, if a glimpse at all, of the birds can be obtained. The ear needs training as well as the eye: one whose hearing is accustomed to the sound of ducks' wings can bring his eyes to bear accurately upon the point where, if anywhere, the passing birds will for a moment flash within range of human sight; whereas the novice finds himself quite unable to locate the sound, and therefore fails to see them. Plenty of flight-shooters can stop a moderate proportion of shots when firing under the guidance of hearing alone.

As the inland duck-shooter studies—or should study, and should continue to study throughout the season—the feeding-places of the birds among which

he takes his sport, so should the coast-fowler seek out —and he will know them by unmistakable signs—the feeding-places of the widgeon. The latter are usually covered at high tide. But one may often find spots —spots where the grass is short and fine and where the mushroom grows in its season—whereon the widgeon feed. Having found that the birds visit such a spot, and having made himself a pit, the flight-shooter may confidently look forward to good sport—far better sport, as a rule, than if he were in a pit on the mud; for in the one case the feeding area is limited, and in the other practically unlimited. A watch should be kept on the low meadows near the coast at the time of heavy rains. When pools of water stand on the meadows or marshes widgeon will very often make them their feeding-places, dropping into the pools at flight-time and grazing in their vicinity through the night. If there come the combination of a fair wind, a black sky, and a moon rising an hour or two after flight-time, a good shot may be made by crawling up-wind, before the moon rises, to the pit which one has previously dug in a position to command a pool, and waiting for the birds to gather together on the water, which they are sure to do with the coming of the moonlight. Whether a feeding-place be that of widgeon or

mallard, never shoot it more often than once every four or five nights, or the birds, except under special circumstances, will desert it entirely.

Let me advise the duck-shooter to make a practice of always carrying a compass. Losing one's bearings in a fog or after dark may prove not merely an inconvenient but a serious matter, as I have found to my own cost in days gone by.

The duck-shooter can often have excellent sport after daylight has entirely left the sky. From a pit on the shore, when the birds are kept moving by other gunners, one may make fair bags; but, as in the case of most circumstances connected with wild-fowling, the sportsman must take one day with another, knowing that it depends entirely upon chance whether or no the widgeon will come, or will allow themselves to be called, within range. For three or four nights running he may spend a couple of hours in his pit without ever having the opportunity of pulling a trigger, and the next night he may have a dozen shots. The duck-shooter on the shore must learn to give an exact imitation of the widgeon's call—an easy task. There is, by the by, an excellent mallard call, an American invention, which the inland duck-shooter can use with good effect at times. When the night is not very dark, duck, after

feeding on land for an hour or two, make their way to any water which may be near at hand. This general movement to water is usually known as the second flight. If the gunner, as he ought to have done, has ascertained by the presence of feathers what water is used by the birds, and if, after the flight proper is over, he takes his place there under cover of a blind or pit, sport will be his.

I have experienced no more delightful sport than walking after duck on a light night. On the saltings, as well as on inland marshes, good bags are to be made. India-rubber boots should be worn, in order to deaden the sound of the tread, and if there is snow upon the ground the gunner should be garbed in his white overall. All likely water should be walked to up-wind, as far as it is possible to do so. After firing a shot, let the gunner remain still for some minutes, as other birds which may have been put on the wing by the sound of the discharge are likely enough to come within range if no movement be made by the shooter. It is to be remembered that when one springs a duck with one's back to the moon it is often very difficult to distinguish the bird plainly; whereas, if it presents the shadow side to the gunner, if the gunner be facing the bright part of the sky, it offers as clear and easy a shot as can be

desired. Hence always spring duck towards the moon, if the wind allows.

A dog which will work well, and will also retrieve well from both land and water, is indispensable to the sportsman who kills duck with a shoulder-gun. On a matter which affects both the wild-fowler and his dog, let me say here that when the gunner intends to conclude his day by waiting on after the flight, I strongly recommend that he should knock off for an hour or two in the afternoon. If he has to tramp a couple of miles to the nearest fire and a couple of miles back to his stand for the flight, the time and labour entailed are not thrown away in the long run. A dog which, after a hard day, has to sit and shiver, and do nothing for more than a very short time, is extremely apt to turn sulky when his help is most needed, and having once turned sulky, a thing not to be wondered at, he will do so again under similar circumstances, and can never thenceforward be depended upon as an all-day dog. Allowed an hour to rest and dry before a good fire, he will be fresh and keen for work at flight-time and after. The same thing applies to the gunner himself, who, with dry clothes and braced by the effects of a rest and a light meal, is not only in better mental and bodily trim, but is also far less liable to the constitutional

ill-effects which sooner or later are sure to make themselves felt by the wild-fowler unless he takes due precautions. Many wild-fowlers rely, to their cost, on what they believe to be a constitution proof against any exposure to wet and cold.

Of the actual use of the shoulder-gun on duck there is little to be said. The errors into which a beginner is liable to fall are those of giving insufficient allowance to passing birds—whose speed is often much greater than might be supposed—and of holding too low for birds sprung near at hand. The utterly bad habit of closing the left eye when taking aim is responsible for the missing of most rising birds. Any one, unless the sight of his left eye be appreciably stronger than that of the right, can easily acquire the power of shooting with both eyes open; and if he does so he will have reason heartily to congratulate himself on the improvement in his average. With the left eye closed, a rising bird or a straight-away rabbit is out of sight if one attempts to aim steadily above it; with both eyes open the object of the aim is always in view, and one can calculate allowance and hold as steadily at the straight-away rabbit or the rising bird as one can at any broadside shot.

In flighting and in killing duck by night, more

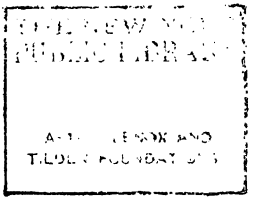
than in any other kind of shooting, the gunner is handicapped if unaccustomed to shoot with both eyes open. He sees comparatively indistinctly; his ability to gauge distance is gone the instant his left eye is shut, and in that infinitesimal space of time in which he has so often to act, his right eye alone cannot tell him whether the bird is twenty yards away or forty. The thick feathering of duck often acts effectively as a buffer to the shot when birds are coming head on to the sportsman, or when passing over him. For this reason, when one is shooting in a good light, duck should not be shot at till they have passed above or by the gunner. In a bad light one would not, of course, ever think of doing otherwise than firing the instant a chance offered itself, and without ever considering whether the birds were coming or going. I advise, however, as the exception to the rule of not shooting at duck till they have passed; that, when birds are coming low and straight for the gunner, he should fire at the leader when it reaches a range—say, between twenty and twenty-five yards—at which it is certain to be stopped by a correctly placed charge. In most cases the other birds will tower at the shot, and then, if the shooter watches for his chance and instantly takes advantage of it when it

comes, he will often have the opportunity of dropping a couple of them with the second barrel.

Flapper shooting is now almost a thing of the past, for our County Councils have freely, and wisely, availed themselves of the powers granted them under the Wild Birds' Protection Act of 1894, that is, have so far deferred the date, August 1, fixed by the Act of 1880 for the beginning of the duck-shooting season, as to allow the flapper and the old drake to grow their wing feathers to fully serviceable length, and thus to be able to meet the gunner on fair terms. There is still something to be desired in the matter of bird legislation. One would like to see a further Act, applying to every county indifferently, making it illegal to kill any duck before September 1. A fortnight too late for some counties, many will say. Better it were, however, to err on the side of lateness than on that of earliness; I consider August 15 certainly too early for some counties, in which it stands as the opening date. While wishing to see deferred and made general, irrespective of county, the opening date for duck shooting, one would also like to have the time when duck may be shot seaward of the springtide line extended from March 1 to March 14, or even March 21.

Flapper shooting was good enough fun, but

FLIGHT SHOOTING NEAR THE SHORE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unsportsmanlike, for killing flappers and moulted drakes can only be termed unsportsmanlike when one considers that shooting them robbed the district of the infinitely better sport they would have provided a few weeks later, and that early duck shooting had a largely detrimental effect upon the stock of home-breeding birds. A brood of flappers was discovered in that rushy fleet of the big tidal river. One had a good spaniel, and the spaniel set to work. It was fair enough fun while it lasted. But then? In half an hour or so the flappers—and very likely their devoted mother as well—were safely stowed away in the punt. Had, however, a short time been allowed to go by, these flappers would have been flappers no longer—the place would have remained their haunt; not only would they have established a lead for migrants during the winter, but those of them which survived the season would have bred there or thereabouts. Thus their slayer, in return for a short spell of comparatively poor sport, did harm to himself and to the fowling fraternity of the district as well. No one could be blamed for flapper shooting while the law unwisely allowed it; if you did not kill the birds yourself other people would kill them instead. The unwisdom or unsportsmanlikeness of killing duck not fully feathered was realised by our forefathers as early

as the time of Henry VIII., in whose reign there was passed an Act making it illegal to take wild duck between May 31 and August 30. This, of course, was old style; the ten days' difference of Henry's time making the dates in new style those of June 10 and September 10. The Act in question is described, in modern spelling: 'An Act against the destruction of wild-fowl at such time as the said old fowl be moulted and not replenished with feathers to fly, nor the young fowl fully feathered perfectly to fly.'

Within the memory of people still living there was wild-fowl shooting in what is now the heart of London. At the time of George II., where Hanover Square now stands was a powerful spring, the haunt of duck and snipe, which were shot by Cockney sportsmen of the time. Still more recently, the land on which Belgrave Square and Eaton Square were built—in 1825—was swampy ground, where duck, snipe, and plover might be killed. The marshes near at hand, now naught but brick and mortar afforded shooting of no mean order. On the low land of Lambeth, my own grandfather had good days among the snipe. London was a little place then. During the early part of Victoria's reign the kite and the magpie nested in the elms which then

surrounded St. Giles's Church, and the raven no further away than Hyde Park.

Probably the finest duck-shooting in all the world is that which falls to the lot of guns participating in the sport on certain English estates. Among wild-bred birds I believe the best sport in the kingdom is had at Granston Manor, where there is a marsh about seven miles in extent; on Lord Castletown's marshes near Abbeyleix; at Stanford, where some forty acres are covered by one of Lord Walsingham's meres; and at Holkham. Scattered over the Granston marsh are stands screened with reeds, wherein the guns take up their places, and, the duck being then kept on the move by beaters, magnificent shooting is obtained. At Somerley and Netherby very large bags are made; but here the duck are home-reared birds. At Netherby, in October 1902, during which year Sir Richard Graham bred over ten thousand duck, three days' shooting resulted in a bag of more than three thousand head. On the first day nine guns—including the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Montrose, Lord Howe, Lord Oswald, the Hon. H. Stonor, and Sir Richard Graham—accounted for 1,141, the bag on the second day being 1,112, and, on the following day, 1,020. At the close of the final day the Prince of Wales killed ninety-six birds in sixty

minutes. In December of the same year six guns—including the late Lord Cairns, Sir Richard Graham, and Mr. Guthrie—killed no fewer than 1,317 duck in one day, giving an average of 219½ head per gun, thus quite eclipsing the sensational days of a few weeks earlier and establishing what is likely to remain a record.

When these big shoots at Netherby are organised the keepers, so one is given to understand, have a method of working the birds into enclosures and releasing them a batch at a time. Sir Richard Graham takes the keenest interest in his duck, and when at Netherby rarely fails to make a daily visit to the various ponds. The Netherby duck farms are reputed to be the finest in the kingdom. When feeding-time comes a large quantity of corn is scattered on the ground. Then the keeper winds his horn. In response to the well-known call vast numbers of birds come sweeping and swirling through the air from all directions. Tame though these duck are in the ordinary course of their existence, when driven they prove themselves as quick on the wing as any wild-bred bird. A man must be a crack shot to acquit himself well at Netherby.

The shooting poacher rarely devotes attention to duck, for the chances of making a bag are too

uncertain to compensate for the risk run. Birds are sometimes drawn to a certain part of a stream or other haunt by systematic feeding, and then taken by means of gins set just beneath the surface of the water. One hears it stated that duck are caught on hooks baited with a bean, or something equally tempting; but although I have spent many years of my life in the most 'ducky' parts of England and fraternised with poachers of every degree, an instance of the practice has never come before me.

If any duck-shooter who has access to dyke-drained country whereto duck come to feed in fair numbers wishes to make an occasional heavy shot, I can tell him how it may be done. Select a part of a dyke where there are dry spaces, extending, if possible, over a distance of twenty yards, between the water and the sides of the dyke. This is to be the feeding-place. If there should be any growth in the dyke clear it away or tread it down. Fifty yards from the middle of the feeding-place, place a tub in the middle of the dyke and drive in four stout stakes, which, when cross-pieces have been attached to them, are to serve as the resting-place of a swivel gun. Screen the whole contrivance with a few boughs and rushes. At the time when migrants begin to reach us—to act earlier in the season is unfair both to the

local birds and the local sportsmen—tether a couple of live decoys in the dyke and keep the place regularly fed with wheat. It is to be noted, one should say, that if there are moorhens about they must be killed, or most of the corn will fall to their share. When the decoys have established a haunt, and a fair number of duck are known to visit the dyke, place the gun in its mountings and train it to sweep the feeding-place; and towards flight-time make yourself as comfortable as possible in the tub. Delay firing till you are sure the flight is over. Put back the decoys the next day and continue to feed the place. Let critics who have never engaged in the rough-and-tumble work of wild-fowling, and are unaware of the skill, perseverance, and endurance the gunner has to exercise in order to bag just a few couple of birds, call this means of killing duck unsportsmanlike, or anything else they choose. It is not, however; it is as sportsmanlike as punting or partridge-driving, and is a perfectly legitimate method of outwitting birds which are inaccessible by day; and I heartily advise any one having the facilities to put it into practice, and to congratulate himself with a clear conscience on the few good and exciting shots which a normal season will always yield him in return for the trouble entailed.

CHAPTER III

PRESERVING AND LURING THE DUCK

THE reason why owners of shootings are now giving so much attention to the rearing of duck is because as a sporting bird the mallard takes very high rank indeed; coming over the guns in right style, he is every whit as good as the pheasant. True, unless the shoot be a very large one, and a very well watered one to boot, such a thing as a day's duck-shooting is quite unattainable. But, on the other hand, in the case of a moderate-sized shoot whereon there exist, or whereon there are made, even only a couple of ponds, a corresponding number of delightful diversions may be afforded, whether the main business of the day be pheasant or partridge shooting —how delightful, only those who have experienced the change from game to duck are able fully to realise. Duck, autochthonic birds, and little subject to disease, are more easily reared than pheasants; they

can in most cases be kept at home with no more difficulty than pheasants, and at less or no greater expense in feeding. It will therefore be useful to discuss the treatment of tame-bred mallard.

The pieces of water one proposes to convert into duck-ponds should be as near the middle of the shoot as possible, the distance separating them from each other should preferably be not less than half a mile. The larger they are the better. Their situation must be so far isolated that there is no risk of the birds being disturbed.

There may be a stream running through the shoot, or there may be ponds or springs suitably situated. In the former case dams can be built to hold up a body of water sufficient to last through any spell of drought during which the stream may run dry. The possibility of water giving out during a dry season must always be one of the first considerations, this possibility being obviated by efficient puddling. Puddling is often an expensive business when matter of a satisfactory kind can only be obtained by carting from a distance; but, given a porous soil and ineffective puddling, the owner will have endless worry and trouble before him. It is often possible very largely to increase the area of an existing pond without making the new part so shallow that it will dry up

during drought. One may say, too, that a spring which has hitherto served no useful purpose can be converted into a perfect pond if the soil be excavated to a sufficient depth and the bottom be puddled. It is not always, however, that such facilities exist, and when they are wanting ingenuity must be exercised in other directions. A good and lasting pond may, for instance, be created by taking a suitable hollow and puddling a fairly large basin and then conducting water to it by drainage or by means of ditches cut athwart the fall of the land, these ditches having ducts flowing into the pond. Of course I am merely glancing at the matter embraced in this paragraph; failing practical experience of pond-making it is better to consult expert opinion before beginning operations. As the work, whether damming, puddling, or draining, is to be done with a view to permanency, it should be scientific in its projection and thorough in its workmanship.

After making the ponds there comes the question of rendering them attractive to their future inhabitants. Unless this question be fully studied a very moderate degree of success will attend the efforts of the duck preserver. However attractive the ponds may be, and however little disturbed, one must —unless the birds are shot very early in the season

—always calculate upon losing a certain small proportion of the duck reared, for the mallard is a wanderer by nature; but with forethought and care this leakage can be reduced to a minimum. As a set-off to the almost inevitable loss of a few of one's own birds, strange birds will visit and take up their quarters on attractive ponds—sometimes in numbers far exceeding those of the deserters—if one is preserving in a district where there are other preservers; but in a non-duck district one can calculate upon no such reparation.

The great attraction to duck is cover; it gives the birds a sense of security. Mallard—unless kept as tame as farmyard poultry, and not always then—can no more be expected to attach themselves to a bare, open pond than can pheasants be expected to make themselves at home in a locality void of trees and undergrowth. One sees it advised that rushes should be introduced; but, in my own opinion, they are not only unnecessary but undesirable as well; they eventually become a nuisance. As temporary cover let stout brushwood be used, and plenty of it. It should be thrown down roughly—half in half out of the water. Against the brushwood plant strong young brambles, or well-rooted bramble runners. Islands which have been made in the pond are

also to have brushwood and bramble upon them. On the north side of the pond there should be a gently shelving bank, gravelled if possible, but otherwise given a hard surface, whereon the duck may sun themselves and where they are to be fed. Adjoining this feeding-ground let there be a thick crescent-shaped dead-hedge, so built that the attendant may approach without being seen by any bird on the water, and from the shelter of which, by casting the grain over it in handfuls, he is able to feed his duck without alarming, or without seriously alarming, strange birds which may have found their way to the pond. Forming an outer circle there should be planted well-grown evergreens — I consider oval-leaved privet the best for the purpose—while, beyond the evergreens, there should be yet another circle, thickly planted, of willow, if the soil be suitable, or of hazel if it be porous. A very few years' growth will make a pond arranged in this manner a perfect home for duck. If there are rabbits in the locality they should be wired out.

And now a few words as to rearing and management.

As with the eggs of the tame duck so with those of the mallard kept in a domesticated state; a considerable proportion of the early layings are unfertile.

Hence it is unsatisfactory to put down eggs of these layings. Nor is any object served by producing very forward birds unless the owner wishes to kill them as soon as the season opens. Any of the reputable game farms will book dates for sending eggs which may be relied upon in the matter of fertility. I consider it inadvisable ever to encourage duck to breed wild; it is a better plan to kill off every bird before the season ends and start each year with a fresh stock, raised either from bought eggs or from eggs produced by one's own pinioned birds. If duck breed wild, it is not a very uncommon occurrence for a pair of old birds to take a trip with their family some windy night and never to be seen again. Old birds, too, will often lead the younger populace of the ponds into habits of wandering further afield than is sometimes altogether well as concerns their personal safety. Any strain of domestic blood detracts from the value of the mallard as a sporting bird.

The main essentials to successful hatching may be briefly summarised:—Let the nest, sweet straw and never anything else, rest upon the ground. Let the clutch number no more than seven if the hen is set in cold weather, and in no case more than ten. Let the hen sit on nest-eggs for two or three days

before the clutch is placed in the nesting-box. For the first fourteen days she should never be off the eggs longer than ten minutes at a time. Let her be taken from the nest at the same hour each morning, fed in a coop, and then put back on the nest. After the first fourteen days, unless in cold weather, she may be allowed off the eggs for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes. About the twenty-third day remove and destroy any eggs which on testing are found to be infertile or to contain dead chicks. On the twenty-fifth day remove the eggs and nest, loosen the soil, and then pour a quart or more of warm water into the nesting-box, allowing the liquid to be thoroughly absorbed by the earth before putting back the nest and eggs. Early in the morning of the twenty-sixth day feed the hen as usual, and then do not disturb her again till the chicks are out of the shell. When the latest chick is clean and strong, coop the hen in some dry and sheltered situation, under cover if possible.

Young wild duck will do well if fed as their domesticated relatives are usually fed; but they do better, and this with less trouble to their attendant, if raised from the shell on food specially adapted to them—such as Gilbertson and Page's largely used wild-duck meal—the special food containing a

correct proportion of animal matter. The highest possible results are attained if Gilbertson and Page's food be used according to the makers' directions. Till they are about fourteen days of age, the young birds should be fed at intervals of from two and a half to three hours throughout the day, the first feed being given as soon after daybreak as possible. From this age till they are a month old the intervals between feeding times should be about four hours. A fortnight later three meals a day are sufficient.

The young of wild duck are as subject, or almost as subject, to cramp as are those of their domestic relatives, and the same care in keeping them from water must be exercised. Whatever kind of vessel be used, it should give the birds easy access to the water for drinking purposes, while at the same time preventing them from wetting their down. I have found a framework made in the shape of a gardener's hand-light and covered with galvanised netting—the cover being placed over a shallow earthenware baking-dish—a most satisfactory contrivance. Let the ducklings drink their fill after each meal, and then put the water out of their reach and sight. Care is necessary in guarding the young birds against rain, and also against running on wet grass that is not closely fed, for the first few weeks of their life. On

this account it is highly advisable to coop them close to a shed or other building under the cover of which they can be confined when there is rain. If the weather be both wet and cold, they will do better if kept entirely under cover and sheltered from the wind for ten days, or perhaps even more, after leaving the shell. Their run should be on close-cropped grass.

Ducklings are great wanderers, and must be kept within due bounds, or they will stray far from the coops and lose their bearings entirely. Where they are bred in large numbers it is often the practice to employ boys to watch them throughout the day and turn back those which begin to stray too far afield. Failing this, either the meadow in which they are cooped must be wired all round, or else there must be pens within the meadow. The former is to be recommended, on the ground that the birds, having a wide range, are able to secure a larger quantity of their natural food, insects; the latter on the ground of economy. I have found all practical requirements met by having a twenty-five-yard length of wire netting round each coop and moving the enclosure—a very brief task—every day. The netting is supported by a few pointed sticks.

At the age of eight weeks, never earlier, the young birds, together with their coops, may be taken to the

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ponds. Let them be moved early in the morning. An eye should be kept on them for a day or two in case they may show themselves inclined to stray from the water. The coops can then be removed. Corn must now be gradually substituted for meal. I advocate the use of wheat in preference to other corn. Feed the birds twice a day till they are strong on the wing. After this one meal a day is sufficient. However abundant spent grain may be in the neighbouring fields, the daily feed at the ponds should never be discontinued. Feed late in the afternoon.

At times of hard frost an additional morning meal, placed on the ground before dawn, should be given. During such periods the attendant will be, or ought to be, abroad in advance of daylight for the purpose of clearing ice from the part of the water he is keeping open for his birds. Unless the duck are few in number they will by their movements prevent the piece of water from freezing during the day. If, however, on account of the birds being few in number, or on account of the frost being very severe, the water should become coated during the day, the ice must again be broken and raked off after dark.

A great deal of all this and of what is to follow may be looked upon as beside the mark by men who deal with a large head of duck, who keep them very

tame, and who aim only at providing a few big drives during the season. It is, however, in the interests of duck-preservers of every grade that I am writing—of those who wish to make as much as possible of small-scale shooting, no less than of those who exercise control over shooting of the most pretentious kind. The duck-preserver on a modest scale hopes to augment sport among his own birds by the arrival of wild birds, which in hard weather are certain to visit the ponds if within touch of a duck-frequented district. By feeding late in the afternoon he expects duck dropping in at flight-time to find pickings on the feeding-ground, and to make the pond a regular place of call, if not a temporary home. Hence by all possible precautions he avoids alarming any visitors which may happen to be upon his ponds. During a spell of hard weather duck move far and wide in search of open water. After dark—say, an hour after—what birds happen to occupy the pond at the time may be put on the wing by a slight noise and without sustaining more than an immaterial fright, and the attendant can then clear all the floating ice from the water he is keeping open. In the same way they may be sprung, and the water raked free from ice, shortly before daylight.

There is a point, generally quite ignored by most

duck-preservers, and yet looked upon as one of the utmost importance by others—viz. that of accustoming the birds to the sound of gun-fire. When duck are reared in large numbers and killed in a few big drives, it makes no difference whether they are used to gun-fire or not; as, however little notice may have been taken by them of a few shots fired near the pond, the first fusillade from the blinds will set them moving as wildly as though it were their first experience of the sound of powder. But to those who, as I have said, wish to make as much as possible of small-scale shooting there is considerable advantage in having duck which, within reasonable bounds, are not gun-shy. The owner can kill wild birds at flight time near his ponds without putting his own duck on the wing. He can also spring wild birds from the water during daylight by firing at such a distance that his own birds take no notice of the sound. Before the ducklings are moved to the pond let their feeder's arrival be announced by the discharge of a horse-pistol, and let this be continued till they have been on the water two or three weeks. Afterwards a shot or two should be fired, at intervals of a few days, as the attendant is leaving the pond and while the duck are busy feeding.

Duck often prove themselves difficult birds to

drive. Only by means of experiment can it be ascertained what line they are most willing to take when the wind is in any given quarter, and unless such knowledge be gained disappointment is extremely likely to result when shooting days arrive. If trials are made beforehand by putting the birds on the wing when the wind is in different quarters, the keeper, acting on the knowledge thus gained, will be able to place the guns satisfactorily, or will generally be able to do so.

Unless there exists natural cover sufficiently dense, blinds must be erected in suitable situations. If only meant to be temporary they should be put up some weeks before the time of shooting begins, for the duck is extremely suspicious of any new feature in the accustomed landscape. It should be ensured beforehand that no strange object shall be in or near the direction the birds are wished to take; a team at plough, for instance, or a man at work on a hedge, may entirely spoil a drive. The birds, of course, should be sprung as quietly as possible. Let the work be entrusted to a single beater. To the right and left of him, at a distance of 150 yards or so, there should be stops, whose duty it is to remain in cover as long as all is going well, and suddenly to show themselves and endeavour to turn towards the

guns any birds which show themselves inclined to take a wrong line. When all is ready the beater advances slowly and silently. The moment he sees duck on the water, unless the birds rise at sight let him flutter a white handkerchief. As long as there are duck on the wing he must remain motionless: there is always the likelihood that the birds will wheel and give the guns a second, or even a third, chance. When he sees, or when a whistle tells him, that they are clear away, he endeavours to spring another bunch by similar means. After he has sprung all the birds it is possible to spring by sight, the cover should be quietly beaten out, and finally a dog should be allowed to run through. It often happens that an odd bird or two, alarmed at the unaccountable fear displayed by those duck which have been sprung through seeing the beater, hide themselves in the overhanging cover, and can only be put on the wing by a dog. Of course, it is not always possible to spring duck in small bunches; the whole party may be packed on the water at the time, and may rise at the first alarm. The more the pond is broken by islands the better is the prospect of springing the birds satisfactorily.

It should be made a rule that no duck are to be fired at till they are above or past the line of guns,

and that under no excuse shall a retriever be allowed at large till the drive is completely over. It is desirable to have competent markers judiciously stationed. Hard-hit duck often carry on a long way before they drop. If there are two ponds, one should be shot at the beginning of the day and the other towards the close; if there are three, take one in the morning and the others in the afternoon; if there are four or more, shoot in the morning those of them on which no birds disturbed from other ponds have settled (a fact to be made known by properly stationed watchers), and the remainder later in the day. When duck which have been shot at light on a pond occupied by other duck, the uneasiness of the former is immediately imparted to the latter. Hence, if the pond be shot shortly afterwards it is probable that all the birds will be found bunched, and will rise simultaneously; and, following the lead of the twice-sprung birds, they are likely to make a long flight and settle somewhere far out of bounds, perhaps for the day. On the other hand, if ponds whereon duck have lighted in the morning be not shot till the afternoon the birds will be found broken up, and when again sprung will drop into water near at hand.

Let it be remarked that if the ponds are shot at too short intervals a proportion of the birds, perhaps

all, will desert them permanently. A fortnight between each shooting may be regarded as the minimum interval it is wise to allow.

We come now to the question of luring wild duck to frequent a certain piece of water as a feeding spot, and to afford sport at flight-time. When practised near a part of the coast, or any inland district frequented by duck, the system I am about briefly to describe invariably commands success.

There must be a pond, either natural or artificial, to serve as the home of the decoy birds. Though quite a small piece of water will answer the purpose in view, it is advisable that the pond be not less than a quarter of an acre in extent, while half an acre is better. A perfect pond can be made at small expense by cutting a pan athwart a marsh dyke. There should be some rough cover dotted round the water; the bank should shelve gently and should be of considerable area. It is here that corn is scattered, and it is one's object to ensure that the decoy birds and birds flighting early shall be unable to clear up the food before the advent of late arrivals. Scattering grain thinly over a wide surface achieves this end.

The decoy birds may be either a cross between the common tame duck and the mallard, or a further cross having the half-bred bird as one parent and

the pure mallard as the other. I consider the former preferable when one's pond is within or near to a locality frequented by wild birds, and the latter when it is more or less remote therefrom. The greater the proportion of domestic blood the stronger the attachment to home; the greater the proportion of wild blood, the wider the range of the birds and the better the prospect of establishing leads from a distance. The ducklings should be placed on the pond at the age of eight or nine weeks. Never allow these decoy birds maize, as the food makes them too fat and hence disinclined to fly far on their own accord. If the pond be situated in a district wherein mallard breed, efforts should be made, by scattering wheat thinly over the feeding-ground, to induce wild-bred birds to frequent the pond as soon as the young are able to fly; when one has to rely on migrants alone, early October is soon enough to abandon feeding after the ordinary manner in favour of scattering the corn over a wide area. The decoy birds should be kept very tame.

A word here on the subject of vermin. Rats and moorhens are almost certain quickly to discover a pond where duck are fed, and unless remorseless warfare is waged against them they will be found a standing nuisance. It is only a half measure to destroy

moorhens found on the pond; they should be killed in every haunt they may have within a considerable radius, and should be continuously sought for in these haunts, for if they find their way to the pond and have to be killed there, this can often only be done at the cost of unduly disturbing the duck. When they have a stronghold from which it is impossible for dogs to dislodge them for the gun, a satisfactory method of taking them is by means of a large fall-trap—netting stretched over a wooden frame. If corn is scattered under the trap at the same hour every day the birds quickly lose all fear of the erection, and the hidden worker of the trap can make a good catch very shortly after throwing down the corn. Few birds, by the by, are better than a moorhen when properly cooked.

And now as to shooting the wild birds which are drawn nightly to visit the pond and feast upon the corn provided for them.

The blinds, three or four of them, preferably made of a triangular frame work screened with rushes, should stand at regular intervals round the pond, and distant from it some thirty or forty yards. When November comes—we are passing over sport which may be afforded earlier in the season by local birds—go late, on a still afternoon, and, having made sure that the

decoys are at home, take your place in a blind from which it is possible to retreat without being seen or heard by any bird on the pond, and from which you can hear when any duck alight on the water. Wait there till you are sure the flight must be over. If only one or two parties arrive, it is better to defer thoughts of shooting for awhile, as these birds may be there for the first time; but if three or four different lots drop in you may feel sure that a satisfactory lead has been established. Even then, however, it is just as well to put off shooting for a week longer.

A quarter of an hour or so before what you calculate to be the beginning of flight-time, on the day arranged for beginning operations, give your decoy birds a full feed. Then let a dog put them roughly on the wing, a shot or two being fired as they are leaving the pond; they will not go far, and having been disturbed in this manner, and having had their hunger quite satisfied, they will seldom return at the flight. The guns are then to take their places in the blinds. Repeat these proceedings every time of shooting. Not till the flight is quite over must there be made any attempt to gather the duck which fall; mark them, by sound if not by sight, as carefully as possible, and let the dog retrieve them afterwards. As long as a lead

remains unbroken sport may be had throughout the season. It should be made a rule never to shoot more often than once a week. If very few birds appear at any time of shooting do not molest them again for two or three weeks, by the end of which they will have given the lead to fresh batches. Duck which have been shot at or have had their companions shot at a few times will often come in high over the pond and drop to the water almost like stones. Such birds should be roused again directly they reach the water, when they are almost certain to give one of the guns an easy shot.

So simple and so effective is the plan of obtaining tip-top flight shooting that one often wonders at the lack of enterprise on the part of owners of water naturally suited to its practice in so seldom putting it into effect. There is a lonely pond of fair dimensions in the very heart of a duck district. During the season, by day, two or three couple of mallard and a few teal may be killed there; nothing more. Yet the owner, in return for small trouble and small expense, might week after week have the enjoyment, brief, it is true, of the very cream of shooting. Of course a great deal depends upon the season and the locality; but with things at their best—a good season in a good locality—a year's bag will amount to several

hundred head. Even in what is anything but a duck district, upland far from the coast and from water frequented by the birds, ponds have been made successful to the extent of yielding a head of from fifty to a hundred in the season. The experiment is always worth trying if there seems any likelihood at all that it may succeed.

Wild duck do not come within the meaning of the term game, in England, Ireland, and Wales, though (40 and 41 Vict. c. 78) they are counted as game in Scotland. With regard to the protection of their eggs, however, they are in all cases game according to the provisions of the Game Act of 1831. Although wild duck are not within the statutory meaning of game in England, Ireland, and Wales, the birds, up to a certain point, can be legally protected by owners who have reared them. This limited right of property in home-reared birds only exists as long as they are not allowed full liberty of flight; full liberty not being given—that is, the birds not being allowed liberty by night and day—any person taking wild duck without lawful permission renders himself liable to prosecution for larceny. Scotland excepted; when home-reared duck are allowed their full natural liberty, tenants or owners of land which they visit, or over which they pass, are legally entitled to kill them as

DECOYS AND THEIR WORKING

THE first English decoy, probably set up on Horsey Mere, was planned and constructed by Sir William Wodehouse, of Waxham, Norfolk, in the reign of James II. So says the author of 'The Land of the Broads.' Whether the constructor of this decoy invented the device independently, or whether he drew the idea from a Dutch source, we know not; but, as we do know that decoying was practised in Holland prior to the time of Sir William Wodehouse, I think we may safely assume that the latter was the case. Another writer, whose work is before me, says that the decoy was undoubtedly introduced from Holland. Be this as it may, the use of the decoy soon spread over Norfolk and the neighbouring counties, and thence to the whole of England, or rather to those parts which duck visited in numbers sufficiently great to render it remunerative. Only

in nine English counties has a decoy never been constructed. Three Welsh counties have decoys. Ireland possesses twenty-four. There appears to be no record of this means of fowling ever having been adopted in Scotland. According to an extract from Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey's book on the subject, there are altogether 216 decoys in the British Islands. Of these some fifty or sixty only are being worked at the present time; in the majority of cases the decrease in the numbers of duck visiting the localities has rendered the working of decoys no longer profitable. In the Eastern Counties, as might be assumed, a far larger proportion of decoys was erected than elsewhere. The counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Lincolnshire, and Yorkshire possess between them 121 out of the 192 which are recorded as existing in England and Wales. Norfolk has twenty-six, of which five are still in operation; Suffolk has, or had until a very short time ago, six of her total of thirteen regularly worked; of the twenty-nine in Essex, three are used; while two of Yorkshire's fourteen are, I believe, still kept working. Only one of the thirty-nine in Lincolnshire is now active.

A decoy is simply a piece of water of a certain size, from which radiate shallow, curving channels spanned by crescent-shaped supports. The supports

sustain net, forming a tunnel known as a pipe. The number of pipes may be from one to a dozen or so, according to the size of the water. The Wretham decoy in Norfolk has ten pipes, a larger number than that possessed by any other active decoy in the Eastern Counties, if not in our islands. Iron supports, their ends firmly embedded in the soil on either side of the channel, are used at the mouth of the pipe and for some distance down, and saplings as the channel narrows. The supports are placed at intervals of about five feet. These arches are usually about twelve feet high and twenty feet wide at the mouth of the pipe. They become smaller and smaller, till at the end of the pipe they are found to be only two feet high: thus when the whole structure is covered with net we have a gradually narrowing and curving pipe, the course of which cannot be seen by the duck till their retreat is cut off. At the end of the pipe is a detachable bag-shaped net, known as a tunnel-net. The length of a pipe is usually about seventy yards. On the bank of the decoy, and for some way down the convex side of a pipe, are screens, six feet high, and covered with rushes, so arranged in *échelon* that the decoy-man can pursue his tactics without being seen by the birds on the water, and yet can show himself,

or allow his dog to show itself, at any point. The tall screens are usually connected by low ones, over which the dog, commonly known as a 'piper,' is able to jump without difficulty. The decoy-man keeps himself aware of what is taking place by peeping through the rushes covering the screens. In isolated cases—that of the Berkeley Castle decoys is one of them—a drop-net is made to fall over the mouth of the pipe when the birds have entered, their retreat being thus effectually cut off. This arrangement, however, finds no favour in the eyes of the average decoy-man. At the Fritton decoy they have, or had until recently, in use a plan of hoisting a red flag behind the duck as soon as they have passed into the mouth of the pipe. Duck are enticed into the pipes either by means of decoy-birds or by the antics of a dog, carefully trained for the work. The dog is a bright-coloured specimen of his tribe.

In order to make as clear as possible the usual method of working a decoy let us for a brief time imagine ourselves to be on the spot. The daylight has just come. From the shelter of a screen, and at a point commanding a clear view of the water, the decoy-man—his capacious pockets filled with corn, his dog close at heel—makes a careful survey of the different bunches of fowl upon the decoy. His

choice of a pipe is governed by the direction of the wind and the position of the birds on the water. The choice is quickly made. A few minutes afterwards we see him standing behind the screens near the mouth of the selected pipe, casting over small quantities of grain into the shallow water beyond. Soon the decoy birds, their eyes always on the watch for the familiar sight, become aware of what is taking place. They paddle hurriedly towards their invisible feeder. The attention of the wild birds is instantly arrested by this movement; some of them quickly follow the lead of their tame relatives, others hesitate and wonder what is going on. The decoy birds have begun greedily gobbling up the grain within their reach. Soon all the wild birds within sight of them are swimming towards the feeding place, anxious to participate in the mysteriously provided feast. Gentle, widespread showers of corn, just a pinch or two at a time, continuously reach the water. Nearer and nearer to the pipe are the birds drawn. Now the decoys and a few of the wild birds are within the mouth of the pipe. A strange thing then happens—strange at least to the wild birds: a dog suddenly and silently appears on the bank, runs a few steps and disappears behind the screen as suddenly as he appeared. A few moments afterwards he is again in

sight and again disappears. The curiosity of the birds is fully aroused by this unaccountable performance: their attention more absorbed by the dog than by the food, they begin to enter the mouth of the pipe.

Those gentle showers of grain, which the decoy birds follow eagerly, are still falling. The dog, trained to act as intelligently as a human being could act under the circumstances, keeps showing himself ever further and further up the pipe. The duck follow. So great is their inquisitiveness that they never realise their danger. At last all the lagging fowl of the gathering have entered the pipe. Then without a sound the decoy-man darts back to the mouth of the pipe, where, unseen by other bunches of duck on the decoy, he suddenly shows himself to the birds under the net. At the sight of him and his waving handkerchief the trapped birds rise in a cloud and fly up the narrowing pipe. The decoy-man, on the bank, follows them at headlong speed; a few seconds later he is engaged in extracting his victims one by one from the tunnel net and wringing their necks. The decoy-birds have taken no notice of the familiar proceedings, but are busily clearing up what odd grains of corn they can find, wholly callous as to the fate they have been so largely instrumental in bringing upon their kin. The dead birds safely

stowed away, the decoy-man turns his attention to other birds on the water. If the decoy is of large extent he may be kept on the watch the greater part of the day for opportunities to entice scattered bunches of duck to their doom. Moonlight nights often find him busy. Strange catches are sometimes made in a decoy-pipe. About twenty years ago on a Welsh decoy a heron and a peregrine--the former pursued by the latter—dashed into the mouth of one of the pipes, and were driven forward into the tunnel-net and captured. In the pipes of the Wretham decoy, the following have been taken at different times: pheasant, partridge, snipe, woodcock, owl, hawk, blackbird, thrush, and kingfisher, and two mammals—a rabbit and a pig!

Colonel Mussenden Leathes tells me that on the once highly remunerative, but now dormant, Herringfleet decoy, with its ten pipes, there used to be taken about 15,000 fowl in a season. As recently as 1879 the owner took 207 duck in twenty-four hours. Herringfleet lake, not so many years ago still the haunt of the cormorant and the wild swan, as it is now that of the beautiful crested grebe, was ruined as a decoy by the proceedings of a neighbour. One of the grebes came to a tragic end in 1903 before the eyes of Colonel Leathes and a

companion. In Colonel Leathes' words: 'We saw a huge pike seize a full-sized crested grebe, first by the legs, and then, with a bound half out of the water, it opened its jaws and swallowed the bird at one gulp'! On the Harwich decoy, only about an acre in extent, sixteen thousand eight hundred fowl were taken during a single season. This decoy, so one reads, was ruined by one of the owner's tenants, who, to avenge some grievance, adopted the scheme of burning assafœtida in his garden whenever the wind blew towards the water, thus causing the birds to avoid it entirely and destroying all leads. The Harwich decoy used to yield an annual profit of 1,000*l*. One might give many other statistics showing how immensely destructive to wild-fowl and how remunerative to the owner decoying was made, and is made now, in a few favoured localities. It is to be remarked that as two half-fowl—that is, two widgeon or two teal—are only counted as one bird in decoy returns, the figures I have given do not by a long way represent the actual number of birds. Thus the number of fowl, probably mostly widgeon, mentioned as having been taken in the Harwich decoy in a season might have been recorded as 25,000 or more, instead of 16,800, if each bird had counted as one.

Etymologists have sometimes gone far astray when

seeking to attach its origin to the word decoy. Some, not unreasonably, have believed *duco* to be the root of the word; others have gone one better and added the Dutch *coy*, a cage, to the former word. Nuttall's Dictionary, I find, gives its students the choice of two derivations. One of them, 'from *de*, dam, and coy, quiet,' is quite fanciful, if not ridiculous. The other 'from duck-coy, *i.e.* duck-cage or trap,' is only half correct. Briefly, decoy is simply the Dutch *eende-coy* (a duck-cage or enclosure), minus *een*. The contraction is a natural one. As the device originated in Holland, so did the name of the device.

NATURAL HISTORY OF THE GOOSE

BY

L. H. DE VISME SHAW

GEESE: COLLECTIVELY AND INDIVIDUALLY

ELEVEN kinds of geese have been killed in our islands. Of these five have occurred so sparingly that they cannot be said to demand our attention.

Two—the brent and the bernacle—of the remaining six are known as black geese; the others as grey geese.

All the geese are day-feeding birds; they will, however, feed during moonlight nights.

The sex of wild geese cannot be determined by their plumage. The females are rather shorter in length and less in weight than the males.

THE BEAN GOOSE (*Anser segetum*)

This goose is about 30 inches in length. The bird may be distinguished from other grey geese by having the bean or shield at the tip of the beak black,

then a band of orange round the beak, and then the rest of the beak black. The legs and feet are orange. The bean goose, like the other grey geese, reaches us in September and October. The bird does not nest in our islands, though it is said at one time to have bred in Sutherlandshire, Westmorland, and the Hebrides. The ordinary habits of the bean goose lead it to remain in some open, and therefore safe, feeding-place by day, and with the coming of dusk to journey to the coast, returning to its inland haunt at dawn. Not so very infrequently a gaggle of bean geese will abandon the shore altogether and make their home in some district far removed from salt water. The bean goose is common in various parts of the kingdom. Like all geese, it is an extremely wary bird. The bean goose—and this also applies to the others, both black and grey—if in good condition when shot, and if thoroughly well hung afterwards, is a fairly palatable bird. A goose is improved for table purposes if buried for twenty-four hours in loose earth soon after it has been killed.

Food : Vegetable ; principally grass, young corn, and grain.

THE PINK-FOOTED GOOSE

(*Anser brachyrhynchus*)

The pink-footed goose has the bean black, then a band of yellowish-pink round the beak, and then the rest of the beak black; the feet and legs are pink. In length the bird is about 29 inches. The habits of the pink-footed goose are similar to those of the bean goose, but the former will more often forsake the coast in favour of some inland home. Pink-footed geese are very numerous in certain parts, especially in East Yorkshire and the district of Wells, Norfolk. The three thousand or so geese which every winter make their home on the Holkham marshes are principally pink-footed geese. The pink-footed goose does not breed in our islands. It is said to have nested freely in the Hebrides years ago.

Food: vegetable; principally grain, grass, and young corn.

THE GREYLAG GOOSE (*Anser cinereus*)

The greylag, length about 34 inches, has the bean white, and the rest of the beak pale pink. Its feet and legs are of a dull flesh colour. At one time the

greylag was numerous in parts of England, Norfolk more especially; but it is now rarely seen so far south except during the prevalence of severe weather. In certain districts of Scotland it is fairly numerous. The bird breeds in Scotland and also, so we are told, in one of the Irish counties, but not in England. Long ago it nested freely in the fens of Lincolnshire and Norfolk.

Food: vegetable; principally grass, grain, and young corn.

THE WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE

(*Anser albifrons*)

The white-fronted goose has the bean white, and the rest of the beak a pale pink. The legs and feet are orange. This bird may also be distinguished from the other grey geese by the forehead of pure white, from which it takes its name. The white-fronted goose is about 29 inches in length. The bird is not often seen at any great distance from the sea; its habit is to feed by day on the marshes or other open land near the coast, and to pass the night on the salt water, or on the sandbanks or muds. The bird has not been known to nest in our islands. The white-fronted goose is at times fairly common in certain

parts of England and Scotland, and is numerous in the north and west of Ireland, where it is the commonest of the grey geese.

Food: vegetable; principally grass.

THE BERNACLE GOOSE (*Anser leucopsis*)

The bernacle may be distinguished at a glance from the other black goose, the brent, by the white on its head, the head of the brent being quite black. The bernacle measures about 25 inches. The bird does not breed in our islands. The bernacle is uncommon in England, but is fairly numerous, locally, in Scotland and Ireland. Bernacle reach us later in the season than do the grey geese.

Food: vegetable; principally grass and maritime plants.

THE BRENT GOOSE

(*Anser torquatus, or brenta*)

This bird, the smallest of our geese, measures about 21 inches. It does not breed in our islands. The brent, during the winter, is never seen on dry land; it spends its time either on the salt water or on

its feeding grounds, parts of the seashore whereon the *zostera* grows. However scarce other wild-fowl may be during any season the brent never fails to appear in large numbers. One not infrequently kills what is known usually as a white-bellied brent, a bird lighter in plumage than the ordinary type. Whether this is a distinct bird or merely a variety of the common brent has yet to be satisfactorily determined. I believe it to be a variety only. It has been classified as *Anser brenta glaucogaster*.

Food : sea-grass.

'No bird,' I wrote not long ago, 'takes its way through the air in so stately, so majestic a manner as the grey goose. The creature seems to consider itself far above all showiness, all cheap effect. There is nothing of the dash of the duck or the pheasant, nothing of the grace of the swallow or the lapwing, nothing of the commonplace of the pigeon or the rook, but just that steady, unimpassioned, imposing, stately, majestic progress which differentiates the flight of the grey goose so sharply from the flight of all other birds. Anyone at all observant of the kind of thing who once saw grey geese above him, could never forget the spectacle. Unless beating against

the gale, they nearly always fly in the form of the letter V, a single bird forming the point of the letter and two diverging strings of birds the two lines. In both cases the order is adopted for the purpose of lessening the resistance of the air to all save the leading bird. Observers tell us that each member of a gaggle takes its turn as leader. . . . I have never been so fortunate as to witness a change of leadership. So closely at times do the birds fly in a string that they seem almost to be touching one another. The altitude reached by grey geese when making a lengthy journey is enormous. A faint, barely audible cry reaches one's ears on some still, early winter morning, a cry one recognises as that of grey geese. After searching the zenith, one at last detects the skein, so far up that the birds appear mere tiny specks as they wing their way across the sky.

'The belief, which was at one time apparently well-nigh universal, that bernacle or barnacle geese—probably the bird originally called the barnacle goose was really the brent and not the bernacle at all—were directly evolved from barnacles, or limpets, came about from a resemblance in and corruption of words. Dr. Brewer ("Dictionary of Phrase and Fable") deals with the matter thus: "The strange tales of this creature (the bernacle goose) have arisen from a

tissue of blunders. The Latin *pernacula* is a 'small limpet,' and *bernacula* (Portuguese *bernaca*, French *barnache*) is the Scotch *bren-clake*, or 'Solan goose.'[1] Both words being corrupted into 'barnacle,' it was natural to look for an identity of nature in the two creatures, and the cirri of the limpet were soon found to resemble the feathers of a bird; so it was given out that the goose was the offspring of the limpet. Gerard, in 1636, speaks of 'broken pieces of old ships on which is found certain spume or froth, which in time breedeth into shells, and the fish which is hatched therefrom is in shape and habit like a bird.'" Izaak Walton never doubted that limpets

[1] I do not know Dr. Brewer's authority for thus connecting the Solan goose with *bren-clake*, and I think his doing so is incorrect. The bird known as the Solan goose (Icelandic *sula*) is the gannet, which is not a goose. It seems to me more than probable that *bren-clake* was originally never any other bird than the brent (note the first four letters of the word); that the 'bren' was in the first place the Anglo-Saxon 'brand,' hence brant, hence brent; that the brand-goose, or branded goose, received its name from the white patches or 'brands' on its neck; and that *bren-clake* has no connection whatever with *pernacula* or *bernacula*. Though the Scottish tongue may call, or may recently have called, the gannet the bren-clake, this is no proof at all that the bird originally known as the bren-clake was the gannet; though we now know a certain goose as the bernacle or barnacle goose, this is no proof at all that it was the particular bird about which the barnacle myth grew. The brent is widely known as the water bernacle in our own day.

turned to geese. He says: "That eels may be bred as some worms are, and some kinds of bees and wasps are, either by dew, or out of the corruption of the earth, seems to be made probable by the barnacles and young goslings bred by the sun's heat and the rotten planks of an old ship, and hatched of trees, both of which are related for truths by Du Bartas and Lobel, and also by our learned Camden, and laborious Gerard, in his Herbal." Sylvester translates verses of the above-mentioned Du Bartas in the words:—

> So slow Boötes underneath him sees,
> In th' icy islands, goslings hatched of trees,
> Whose fruitful leaves, falling into the water,
> Are turned, 'tis known, to living fowls soon after.
>
> So rotten planks of broken ships do change
> To barnacles. O transformation strange!
> 'Twas first a green tree, then a broken hull,
> Lately a mushroom, now a flying gull.

The name goose is the Anglo-Saxon 'gos.'

Generations ago, the grey goose used to visit parts of England in far greater numbers than at present. As the time of its arrival synchronised with that of the harvest, and as the grey goose, when first it reaches us, feeds largely on spent corn and pulse, the bird became known as the wayz (stubble) goose

or harvest goose, and there grew a standing custom to feast upon the wayzgoose at the festivities held to celebrate the gathering in of the harvest. Says a writer of the old time:—

> A young wife and an arvyst gos,
> Moche gagil with both.[1]

It has been supposed by many that the name bean goose was given to the bird on account of its liking for beans, and by many others that it was bestowed as a consequence of the supposed resemblance of the shield on the tip of the beak to a bean. Either of these theories is possible; but, as the resemblance of the shield to a bean is more imaginary than real, and as the grey goose of to-day shows no great taste for beans—indeed, will resort to a wheat or barley rather than a bean stubble when it has the choice—each seems to me highly doubtful. Myself, I think a far more probable supposition is that the far-back namers of the bird called it the bane goose (Anglo-Saxon *bana*), that is, the destroying or ruining goose, the goose that strayed in huge gaggles over the fields of young corn and did irreparable damage. Another popular supposition in connection with this bird is that the term bean-feast originated with those harvest

[1] *Reliquiæ Antiquæ.*

festivals of long ago, whereat bean geese formed the staple dish. But, again, I think a much more probable supposition is that the Normans Normanized our harvest festival into *bonne fête*, and that we in turn Anglicised *bonne fête* into bean-feast. Let me remark that there is little doubt that, centuries back, the names bean goose (probably *bane gos*), wayzgoose (probably *wease gos*—Anglo-Saxon *weaxan*, to grow; hence growth, hence young crop; the supposed derivative of *weaxan* being applied to the bird by reason of its depredations among young corn, as one assumes *bane* to have been applied, and having no connection with its comparatively venial habit of feeding on the stubbles in autumn; *wayz*, a remote derivative of *weaxan*, we find to have meant literally a truss of straw), and harvest goose (Anglo-Saxon: *hærfest gos*) were applied indifferently to all the grey geese.

In parts of Scotland, bean geese 'become a pest to the farmers from the damage they do to the young crops, marching like an army across a field, clearing all before them.'[1] Four or five hundred may be seen in a single gaggle. Farmers are sometimes compelled to employ boys to scare geese as they scare rooks.

[1] Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey.

In England we rarely see bean geese in gaggles of more than twenty or so; usually a gaggle of these birds runs only to from half a dozen to a dozen. I have found it, in the wild-fowling districts with which I am familiar, nearly always a correct assumption that when one sees in the distance a skein numbering over twenty, the birds will be found to be pink-footed geese and not bean. By a close observer, who knows both birds well, they can, when on the wing, be distinguished at some considerable distance, the flight of the pink-footed goose being appreciably brisker and less heavy than that of the other.

It is a curious fact that not till between sixty and seventy years ago did ornithology discover the distinction between the pink-footed goose and the bean; until this comparatively recent date every goose with a black bean to its beak was regarded by naturalists as a bean goose. Thirteen years after the foundation (1826) of the Zoological Society of London, a member at one of the Society's meetings read a paper in which it was claimed, for the first time in the history of English ornithology, that the pink-footed goose must be regarded as distinct in species from the bean goose. The claim was recognised as valid by the zoological world, and he who made the discovery (Mr. Bartlett) named his goose *Phœnicopus*.

Soon, however, it was ascertained that before this name was given, the bird had a short time previously been identified as a separate species by a French naturalist (M. Baillon) and by him had been named *Brachyrhynchus*. Locally, we find no distinction drawn in our own day between the two birds, the rustics calling all black-beaned geese bean geese. Of course, the resemblance between the bean goose and the pink-footed goose is great. Their plumage is practically identical, and one can well understand any non-naturalist failing to notice the distinguishing features, or if he noticed them—as they must very frequently have been noticed before the time of Messrs. Baillon and Bartlett—assuming that the pink-footed goose was the female of the bean, or perhaps an immature bird; but still it must be recognised that the fact that no earlier ornithologists noticed the separateness of the species is, as I have said, a curious one.

General opinion credits the greylag with the distinction of being the ancestor of our tame geese, though not a few good naturalists claim that the honour probably belongs to the white-fronted bird. The domestic goose, in general appearance and characteristics, more nearly resembles the greylag than any other wild goose; but then, on the other

hand, it often displays the snowy forehead of the white-fronted goose. Nothing can be said with certainty on the subject. Possibly all the four grey geese have contributed to the domestic blood. I believe there are authentic instances of each of the grey geese having proved fertile with grey geese of other species when mated in confinement.

With reference to the charge of stupidity always directed at the goose, I may perhaps be allowed to quote from an article of my own on the subject :—

'As a matter of fact the bird is by far the most sensible of the birds we keep as domestic poultry, and has more intelligence than the vast majority of other birds. In its wild state it is of all fowl the one least often outwitted by the gunner ; while, the more one studies it in its domestic state, the more strongly does one appreciate its high degree of intelligence. I have most intimate friends among tame geese—birds who know my voice and will answer at any distance, who will fly screaming towards me the moment I appear in sight, who will crowd jealously round me to have their heads patted and their necks stroked, who take the most mischievous delight in trying to untie my boot-laces, rifle my pockets, pull off my buttons, and so on, and who yet will let no one else come within

yards of them. This is not because I take them food; their attachment is, in lower degree, the same as the attachment of a dog to its master. Anyone who has ever made a friend of a goose will bear me out in this statement.

SHOOTING THE GOOSE

BY

W. H. POPE

WILD-GOOSE SHOOTING

On entering the domains of the wild geese the fowler must be prepared to pit his skill and energy against some of the most wary and vigilant birds of the whole wild-fowl race. The sights and scenes, too, which he will often be privileged to witness when in pursuit of these magnificent birds are of all-absorbing interest to the lover of nature. Whether observed at their ease, leisurely grazing on the wide open marshes, or engaged in picking up the scattered grain on the stubbles of the uplands, or, perchance, in 'wedge'-shaped flight as they pass over high up in the skies to their feeding or resting quarters, their fine imposing presence cannot fail to excite his admiration and awaken within him the keenest desire to try conclusions with them. Big and simple though geese seem to be in the distance, their habitual caution renders them very difficult of access. No lengthy acquaintance

with their manners and customs is needed to convince the fowler of their artful nature, for it is apparent in all their actions and movements. Now and again he may possibly meet with some small belated parties of geese when they first arrive on our shores, or during exceptionally severe winters, which are not quite so sophisticated; but large 'gaggles' of these birds are, as a rule, vexatiously difficult to outwit. In matters of discipline, too, wild geese are invariably strict, each individual bird having special duties of its own to perform, either as 'scout' or 'sentinel,' and every 'gaggle' their recognised leaders to guide them in their wanderings from place to place.

The advent of wild geese in autumn is thus welcomed with keen delight by all sportsmen, and, though the contents of the day's bag may often fall far short of his anticipations, the fowler has generally some pleasing remembrance of his adventures to console him for his lack of sport. With bated breath he may have anxiously watched for the smallest indication in the movements of his quarry which seemed to hold out a prospect of obtaining a shot at them, and possibly in despair he may have fruitlessly attempted to stalk the geese in the open. The promise of sport will, however, have been ever present, and he will have gained some insight into their habits which

should be of service to him on a future and perhaps more auspicious occasion.

The chief haunts of the bernacle geese may be said to be on the west coast of Scotland and the north-western portions of our islands; but they are also found in certain localities on the Irish Coast. In the Solway Firth, which is a noted rendezvous for these geese, a resident sportsman says that they feed on the salt marshes by night and spend the day on the sandbanks far out at sea, unless they chance to find some quiet bit of marsh ground to sit upon.

Their time of flight to the marshes is irregular: sometimes it is at dusk, and often later, up to midnight. Further north, again, in the Outer Hebrides, Mr. J. G. Duplessis, who is well acquainted with these regions, says that bernacle geese are numerous, and assemble in large flocks. They are more easily obtained, however, than the grey geese, and their chief resorts are on the green islands in tidal waters. In a high wind and during stormy weather they may often be found in sheltered spots, where they may be successfully stalked. When shot at under such conditions they fly but a short distance and return in a few minutes to the place from which they have just been disturbed. Wild geese are not usually so confiding, but this seems to be a special feature which

belongs alone to the bernacle. It is not astonishing, therefore, to learn that as many as seventeen of these birds have been known to fall victims in one day to the shoulder-guns of two sportsmen in that district.

The brent goose is a very different type of bird; and, all things considered, I think it is the wildest and most vigilant of all the geese. In seasons of severe frost brent geese abound on our coasts, more especially on the eastern seaboard—the Wash, the Essex Blackwater, in England, and the Cromarty Firth in Scotland, being some of their noted haunts. In Ireland, too, brent are found in considerable numbers; and, generally speaking, wherever the exposed character of their surroundings seems to guarantee their safety, and the sea-grass (*Zostera marina*) grows luxuriantly, there the brent will assemble in their thousands. In some parts of France, during even mild winters, I have seen many acres of mudflats simply covered with their black masses.

Inasmuch as the grey and black geese are in all respects so different in their habits, it will perhaps be better to deal first of all with the subject of the grey geese, and reserve the discussion of the brent geese and the methods of shooting them till the latter part of this chapter.

No birds are more regular or local in their habits than grey geese. The punctuality which marks their arrival here in autumn has often been the subject of comment among wild-fowlers, and observers say that year by year the dates of their appearance and departure vary but little. For a few days after their arrival they spend most of their time at sea or on some open ground near the sea, where they apparently sleep. When once, however, they have settled down in a locality which suits them, they adopt it as their home, unless scarcity of food or severe weather drives them elsewhere.

In determining their choice of residence, the food supply is, of course, a consideration of the first importance. The bean and white-fronted geese seem to prefer marsh and pasture ground, though they may sometimes be seen feeding on the stubbles and on the young wheat and clover in company with other species of grey geese. Greylags, on the other hand, although frequently found on marshy land near the sea, are perhaps more graminivorous in their tastes. In the Outer Hebrides, Mr. J. G. Duplessis says that these geese do not appear to migrate, nor is there ever any visible addition or diminution in the number of the home-bred birds. Nesting on the small islands in the fresh-water lochs they have generally

congregated into large gaggles by mid-September, and they do not separate again until the following spring. The greylags of North Britain possess an inveterate enemy in the person of the crofter, who spares himself no pains to get their eggs, and often swims out long distances to obtain them. When, however, the young birds are capable of flight they take ample revenge on the offending crofter, who from August onwards to the period when his corn is in stack must watch day and night to protect his crops.

Pink-footed geese are most abundant on the Yorkshire wolds and the coasts of Norfolk and Lincolnshire. I am indebted to Mr. Alex. J. Napier, of Holkham, for some interesting notes concerning their habits in Norfolk, where they are annual visitors in large numbers. He says :—

Soon after their arrival, which, so far as the main body is concerned, is usually about the end of October, the geese betake themselves to the uplands to feed on the clover ley. The farmers do not bless them, for the amount of grass a goose can consume in a day is astonishing. They do not appear to do much injury, however, to old pastures, but to the young grass they are very harmful, for, besides what they eat, they pull up a great deal by the roots which remains unconsumed and wasted. In addition to clover, geese also eat large

THE CROFTERS' HOUR OF REVENGE

show for barley, newly-sown wheat, and young clover ; and he attributed the variation in the strength of the Yorkshire geese in different seasons almost entirely to the fluctuation in the quantity of this their favourite food.

A marked spirit of clanship seems to exist among all species of grey geese, but when they chance to meet on the same feeding-grounds they will often fraternise. An exception must, however, be made in the case of greylags, which seldom intermix with other geese under any circumstances. At Margam, on the shores of Swansea Bay, which is a locality strongly haunted by geese, the white-fronted species are most numerous, whilst at Berkeley on the Severn, the seat of Earl Fitzhardinge, three kinds are commonly found—the bean and pink-footed being the first to appear in autumn, and succeeded later by the white-fronted geese, which arrive in December and leave at the end of February.

The bulk of the grey geese which are shot in our islands chiefly fall to the gun of the inland sportsman, for there are very few places on the coast where they are accessible to the punter. On the north shore of the Tay Estuary, and also in the river Humber, I am informed that geese sometimes come out to rest on the sandbanks, and on rare occasions, when tide and

other conditions are favourable, the local punt-gunners have been able to obtain a shot at them after night-fall. The best time for seeking them at their marine resorts is on dark nights at the top of a high spring tide, when the punter may sometimes steal up within range of their position. When roosting, however, they usually sit far away in the middle of some long, wide spit of sand, near which the tide scarcely ever flows, and where they can remain quite safe from harm.

The risks they run are calculated to a nicety, and so artful do they become that if the water reaches a point which would enable an enemy to float within range of them, they at once quit the spot, and fly to safer quarters. A mass of geese, when rising into the air, is usually discernible even on a dark night for a few seconds against the sky-line; but it is more or less an affair of guesswork to make anything like a really successful shot.

In his 'Fowler in Ireland,' Sir R. Payne-Gallwey, Bart., says there are several parts of the Irish coasts where grey geese may be killed in the tidal estuaries, and he relates an occasion in 1880, when forty-three of the bean species were obtained by a Limerick punter at the mouth of the river Maigue. The local fowlers sometimes use a wounded goose which has

been tamed as a decoy for the wild birds. The decoy is pegged down in a suitable place in the hope that a stray gaggle may be attracted to it, whilst the fowlers retire to a distance and await the course of events. As a rule, I think grey geese prefer to sit dry and roost on dry ground, but they will nevertheless take to water when compelled to do so by force of circumstances.

Some years ago, when fowling on the north-east coast of Aberdeenshire, I discovered that large numbers of greylags were in the habit of visiting a certain well-known loch near the sea for roosting purposes. Hearing their noisy cackling one night as they flighted in from the uplands, I put off in my punt to try for a shot at them, but as they sat on the water without uttering the slightest sound, I had great difficulty in locating their whereabouts. After searching for some time I suddenly fell in with them in a shady corner of the loch, from which they rose with a mighty splashing and battering of their great wings. Being just able to distinguish their shadowy forms in the gloom, I 'tipped' my punt gun and fired in the direction which they appeared to be taking. Evidently they had cleared the water quicker than I expected, and, instead of a score which I must have killed had I fired a moment sooner, I dropped

but seven birds, which fell from the tail-end of the gaggle.

Although, from the punt-gunner's point of view, grey geese may justly be considered disappointing birds to follow on the coast, they nevertheless afford splendid sport to the inland shoulder-gunner, and in exposed localities there is, of course, great difficulty in approaching them. In olden days various devices were practised by fowlers, among which the stalking-horse or cow perhaps was the most common method. The presence of cattle or horses on the marshes being familiar sights to geese which gave them no grounds for suspecting treachery, fowlers were wont to avail themselves of a trained living animal or its artificial representation, constructed either of leather or canvas, for the purpose of circumventing them. In this way, by hiding behind the dummy, they gradually stole nearer and nearer, step by step, until the geese were well within range of their guns, when they fired at them. Colonel Hawker mentions an instance, in his 'Instructions to Young Sportsmen,' when he stalked a gaggle of geese in this way with a large gun, by taking one of the horses from a plough team and walking up to them under cover of the horse's flank. Whether the wild goose of the present day is possessed of a higher degree of intelligence

than his ancestors, or whether his instinctive dread of any moving object is due to the greater persecution which he suffers from fowlers, the fact seems pretty evident that the era of stalking-horses, cows, and other stratagems of this kind, has for all practical purposes passed away, and that these can no longer be considered reliable methods whereby geese, when in any large numbers, may be successfully stalked. Nor is this keener development of their instinctive faculties less noticeable in their foreign haunts, for Mr. Abel Chapman tells us, in his 'Wild Spain,' that although the ducks of the Spanish *marismas* are frequently killed by the aid of the *cabresto* or stalking-pony, grey geese are rarely beguiled in this manner, unless they happen to be in very small parties. In 'Practical Wild-fowling,' the author gives some excellent advice for shooting geese with artificial stalking-horses, as well as by means of the creeping-carriage, the latter being a machine on wheels, carefully screened with branches and rushes, in which the fowler propels himself overland up to his quarry. This contrivance was, I believe, the invention of Colonel Hawker, and, like the other stratagems referred to, may be successful according to situation and circumstances.

No matter what weapon you may be armed with, to stalk geese on open ground far from any sort of shelter is, under ordinary conditions, a most difficult undertaking. In some places, it is true, you may perhaps be able to crawl up within range of them under cover of some high bank, or by following the line of some convenient dyke; but such natural advantages are not common in the haunts of grey geese. Still, the unexpected does occasionally happen, and I have been told of a case when a Scotch gillie, hailing from Pomona in the Orkneys, actually succeeded in stalking and killing, with an old double-barrelled muzzle-loader, no fewer than thirteen out of twenty white-fronted geese which comprised the entire gaggle at which he fired.

There are times, too, when you may find it answer your purpose to carry the war into the enemy's country, and by digging a pit and concealing yourself at their feeding or resting places you may, perhaps, get a shot if the geese chance to fly or pitch within a reasonable distance of your ambush. Needless to say considerable care will be required in selecting a site for the excavation of the pit, and in order to render the same inconspicuous to their sharp eyes, the material used for covering it up must of necessity be in general harmony with the surroundings. The

smallest uncanny-looking object will otherwise certainly attract their notice.

Of all the plans which have been tried for shooting these wary birds, fowlers generally agree that it is best either to hide yourself behind some natural shelter and waylay them as they fly voluntarily to and fro between their different haunts, or to have them driven by beaters over the shooters as they wait concealed behind natural or artificially-made shelters lying in their lines of flight. Probably, if you are alone or accompanied by a companion, the former of these methods may commend itself to your judgment. Success then much depends upon your knowledge of their habits and fly-lines in the particular locality, and also, if near the coast, to some extent on the state of the tides. Moreover, the rougher and coarser the weather, and the stronger the wind blows, provided that it comes from a favourable quarter, the better will be the sport. In taking up your position you must endeavour at all times to choose a station where the wind blows directly from you towards the geese as they rise and fly up to your lair at a low elevation. On calm, clear days they frequently fly too high for a shot, but in a thick fog they will sometimes skim close over the ground and offer splendid opportunities for the gunner. Inasmuch as geese do not always

return by the same route to their nocturnal haunts in the evening as that which they follow in the morning, local information on this point should be sought.

The rules to be followed when shooting grey geese are briefly these:—First, let it be remembered that it is absolutely necessary to keep your head well down and out of sight of the approaching geese, and that by no anxious movement should you give them the least chance of detecting your presence. By continually bobbing your head up and down, in your desire to see exactly where the geese are likely to pass over, you will most certainly cause them to break away; and the same result will follow if you expose your head too high above the shelter whilst awaiting their approach. Then, in the next place, take care to let the geese come in close before you present your gun to fire at them. To the eyes of a novice these great birds appear much nearer than they really are, and one may thus be tempted to shoot at them before they are within the deadly range. At thirty yards, or, with a heavy shoulder-gun, even at thirty-five yards, you should be fairly sure of your game; but at any greater distance your chance of killing them diminishes with each stroke of their powerful wings. In taking aim, the most vulnerable part of the goose should be selected, which is the head or the wing, the breast

being too thickly clad with close-lying feathers to permit the shot to readily penetrate the flesh. The speed at which geese travel is very deceptive, and is often underestimated by inexperienced gunners. Conscious of the extraordinary celerity of their flight, it thus behoves the gunner to hold well forward if the work is to be done cleanly and scientifically. Many fowlers use 8- or 10-bore guns for goose-shooting, some guns even larger in calibre, and more unwieldy; but, in capable hands, a stout, well-built 12-bore gun, with a suitable charge of, say, BB or No. 1 shot loaded in brass cases, should do considerable execution.

There are many beautiful and interesting sights which the goose-shooter may witness when in search of these fine birds, but none I think can be more striking than that which he will sometimes see when several large 'skeins' of grey geese are in the act of descending from a great height to pitch. The velocity attained, aided, no doubt, by gravity, the wonderful aerial manœuvres, the sidelong shoots downward with partly-closed wings, when the birds literally whizz through the air, will fill the spectator with astonishment. In his 'Wild-Fowler in Scotland,' Mr. J. G. Millais has admirably depicted this trait in goose-life.

Large numbers of white-fronted geese are killed on the marshes at Margam, in Swansea Bay, by keeping them constantly on the move between their feeding and resting places. As soon as they have alighted in one spot the keepers appear on the scene and drive them up, so that they are compelled to 'run the gauntlet' again and again. In heavy weather, when the sea is too rough for the geese to remain on the coast in comfort, and also during dense fogs, they will constantly be moving about from place to place. One of the best stands for shooting the geese at Margam, I am told, is near a railway crossing, where one can at times kill them from behind a telegraph post. Being accustomed to the sight of gangers at work on the line, they take no notice of the human form, and therefore fear no treachery. In his 'Letters to Young Shooters,' Sir R. Payne-Gallwey, Bart., says that during a succession of gales and snowstorms, a few years ago, Mr. Fletcher, of Saltoun, N.B., killed to his own gun at Margam the extraordinary number of sixty-three white-fronted geese in one day; and, again, on another occasion during the same winter, fifty-four of these birds.

One of the oldest and most famous resorts for grey geese, to which I have before alluded, is at Berkeley, in Gloucestershire. Early in the spring

of 1901 I had the privilege of walking over that portion of the ground to which they are especially partial. I was too late, however, to see the geese, as they had already departed on migration at the end of February. The fields which they mainly frequent for feeding purposes consist of wide, open, grass meadows, lying at no great distance from the river Severn, where they roost. Occasionally they visit some smaller grass meadows near by, where the hedges are high and give plenty of cover for the gunner. In one corner of a field I noticed a haystack, which was said to be an excellent stand for the gunner when the geese came to these more inland pastures. It is quite likely from its commanding position that this haystack sometimes serves them as a landmark when flighting inland. Around the feeding-grounds, and near the banks which bound them, hurdles interwoven with straw are erected, behind which the shooters hide when the geese are being driven overhead by the beaters. On rough, stormy days I was told that as many as five or six drives had been obtained; but the geese would not submit to such treatment very frequently. The records of the sport at Berkeley have been carefully and methodically kept for upwards of sixty years on an elaborately decorated wooden panel. The totals for different seasons vary much, but in 1890–91, which

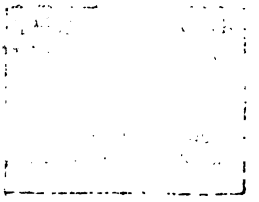
seems to have been the best year, 147 geese were shot, and the best bag, consisting of thirty geese, was made on December 30 in the same year.

Holkham, in Norfolk, concerning which I have already given some notes, is no less celebrated in history as a resort for grey geese. Mr. Napier tells me that the favourite feeding-grounds of the geese at Holkham during the winter months are on the Marsh Farm, which was reclaimed from the sea by the present Earl of Leicester in 1859, and some years later laid down to grass. These marshes are protected by a high sea-wall, and should a strong north-east wind be blowing at dusk, or a strong west wind at daybreak, this wall is often lined with gunners of all descriptions, armed with every sort of weapon, from an 8-bore to a crow-keeping gun tied up with tarred line. The execution done is not often great, for the geese know exactly how high to fly, and as they approach the sea-wall they may be observed mounting up in the air out of reach of any but a very powerful gun. Occasionally, of course, the geese do make mistakes, and a thick fog is the most dangerous time for them, as they seem to lose their bearings altogether.

The best chance of making a bag of geese on the Holkham marshes is at night, when the moon

rises about 7 P.M. As soon as she begins to throw her beams over the marshes the geese may, to a certainty, be heard coming to their feeding-grounds, and if they have been allowed to get a 'say,' or haunt, they are not easily driven away. On January 16 and 17, 1886, Mr. Napier killed in two consecutive nights, on a little marsh of about ten acres, twenty-eight geese with an ordinary 12-bore gun, and he states that he might have killed many more had he been disposed to stay on. No fair amount of shooting will drive the geese away from the locality, but naturally they would not tolerate persecution of this kind for more than a day or two at a certain spot. The nets which the local gunners and fishermen set up on the miles and miles of sand-bars outside, between Holkham and Blakeney, are far more likely to have this effect. On the highest ridges of these sand-bars are the roosting-places of the geese, and here nets, thirty yards long, stretched on poles twelve feet high, are constantly set on dark boisterous nights over hundreds and hundreds of yards of ground. Into the nets the geese have been known to fly, swim, or walk; but it is only in foul, dark weather that netting is really a profitable business. The nets are made of thick cotton, and it seems a marvel that such heavy birds do not cut their way through and

SHELTERING BEHIND THE GATE



escape. But such is not the case, and as many as ten geese and fifty-three gulls have been captured in one reach of nets. It is interesting to note that the takes of geese have of recent years fallen off considerably, which may be attributed to the fact that the geese of the present generation have grown wiser than their ancestors.[1]

The records which have been kept at Holkham for many years are very interesting. The first goose mentioned in the game-book was killed in 1834, and the second in 1841. From 1834 to 1860 the 'Diary' contains no entries of great bags; but this was simply owing to the fact that the geese were seldom shot at. It is said, however, that there were far more geese at Holkham in those days than at the present time. On December 26, 1860, forty-four geese were killed in one day, and 138 in the season. Again, on December 26, 1870, fifty-eight geese were killed by five guns on the Marsh Farm, and on the same day two guns obtained twenty-two on a marsh adjoining, making a total of eighty. In that year the season's bag amounted

[1] Geese are occasionally taken in small pits dug for the purpose. A pit is made of such a size that the goose once in it has not room to open its wings wide enough to fly, and thus becomes cut off from all possibility of escape. The bird overbalances itself in an effort to obtain the corn—placed just a few inches beyond its reach—with which the pit is baited.—ED.

to 137. The best shooting at Holkham is always obtained in stormy weather, when the ground is covered with snow; and the usual method of killing them is by 'flighting.' The gunners separate on the marshes, and go off in different directions to ascertain the line which the geese are following, and then find whatever shelter is available, behind which they hide themselves. A gate sometimes answers the purpose, and if there is snow on the ground the shooter usually envelops himself in a nightshirt or an overall, and a white cap, in order to make himself less liable to detection. The railway runs through the Holkham marshes, and many a time, Mr. Napier says, he has passed flocks of geese within long shot of the train, of which they took but little notice, simply stretching their necks to look around.

There are several other grey goose resorts in our islands, which are, perhaps, less known to sportsmen than those above referred to; but all of the best are, I believe, without exception, in the hands of private owners, who strictly preserve these sanctuaries for their own and their friends' use.

From the foregoing observations it is evident that only a comparatively limited number of fowlers can participate in the pleasures of shooting grey geese at their inland haunts. This exclusive feature is, how-

ever, absent in the case of the brent geese, which are undoubtedly the most popular of all the goose species, and afford sport for hundreds of gunners during the winter in those specially favoured bays and estuaries which they visit with unfailing regularity in greater or less numbers according to the season.

About the end of November or the first week in December their advance-guard begins to arrive on our shores, but the bulk of the brent do not quit northern and eastern Europe until their feeding-grounds in those regions are closed by frost. By the middle of January the geese have generally become established in their customary haunts, and may daily be seen on the mudflats, or swimming about in open water, according to the state of the tide.

In most localities brent spend the night on the open coast, and fly to their feeding-grounds in early morning, when there is enough light to make their passage thither secure from danger. Looking seawards under the brightening dawn they may be observed toying with wind and wave, and constantly rising and settling at the mouth of the estuary. Presently their restless movements become more pronounced, and small parties begin to congregate at some convenient point prior to the general flight to the flats. Then all at once up they rise with one

accord, and as the distant crowd of black-looking specks approaches nearer, and their first faint cries, strongly resembling the humming of millions of bees, strike on the ear, their flight is seen to take definite shape, and to consist of broken lines of geese in chain-like formation, each group of birds following at regular intervals behind the preceding detachments. After wheeling round two or three times, uttering their hoarse, discordant notes, they will, perhaps, finally alight on some favourite ooze banks, where, after one look around, they forthwith commence breakfast. Now and again when flying up harbour the presence of an intruder or some suspicious object on their feeding-grounds may necessitate a change in their plans, in which case the rear ranks will open outwards, as if at the word of command, and allow the leading birds and each troop in its turn to pass through the middle on the return journey. These aerial movements are executed with marvellous precision and an entire absence of all confusion.

In some places where the mudflats are level, and the creeks, being few, afford no cover for the prowling gunner, brent may often be found sitting high and dry on the mud at low water; but I think they prefer, as a rule, to feed on the shallows, where they

can swim about at their ease and feed at the same time. On an ebb tide, if left undisturbed, they usually work their way down to the lower muds by short flights, and return again to the higher muds in front of the rising tide.

To those who are unaccustomed to witnessing vast assemblies of wild-fowl massed together on the flats the sight of two or three thousand brent busily engaged at their meals is grandly inspiriting. More especially is this the case when the sun shines on them and lights up their dusky black bodies and creamy-white sterns. Looked at from the low level of a gunning-punt one cannot take in the whole scene, as the front ranks are only visible to the eye. Watch them for a few minutes and see how careful they are in keeping guard against surprises. Those little brown-black eyes possess a range of vision which few would credit who are not in frequent contact with them. Their sentinels are ever on the alert, and between each mouthful of weed which they root up their long necks are stretched to take a glance around and ascertain that all is well. Sometimes when feeding on the shallows they will begin to play, chasing each other backwards and forwards and sending the water flying in all directions. Seen high and dry on the mud, however, their movements are

somewhat impeded by its sticky nature; but if the sun is warm they often delight in 'breasting' the mud and preening their feathers whilst they rest. The moment that the sentinels pass the word around that danger is imminent every neck is at once erect, and the contented grunt of satisfaction, which is the only sound emitted when happy and contented, at once gives place to a rolling murmur of voices, increasing quickly in volume, until they rise up in alarm with a deafening roar of wings and fly off to some other feeding place.

The disinclination which brent show to leave the tidal flats, or even to fly over any land if it can be avoided, somewhat prejudices the shore gunner's chance of sport with these birds. Under favourable conditions of wind and weather flighters do occasionally obtain a few shots at brent from tubs sunk in the mud near their feeding haunts, or, perhaps, from some natural shelter which happens to lie conveniently in the track of the geese as they pass from one point to another. In one place, I remember, where I used to shoot, there were three small islands in a line, about a hundred and fifty yards apart, which divided their resting and feeding resorts. Under the combined influences of a high spring tide and a strong easterly wind the sea often became so rough

and choppy in the big bays below that the geese were compelled to seek the higher muds and smoother water to windward. Observing that they habitually took a course between these islands when flying up harbour, I conceived the idea of mooring a boat in each of the main channels between the islands, my object being to induce the geese to fly over them instead of passing outside, where they would have been out of gunshot. With a grey-bearded, grizzled old Breton skipper as my companion, I one day put this scheme into operation during a heavy easterly gale. Concealing ourselves among the rocks we patiently waited for some time, and at length a few brent appeared on the scene, flying towards us, subsequently pitching again just in front of our island. Presently about a score flew upwards, saw the boat, and, swerving aside, came straight overhead. Three of them collapsed at once to our joint shots, and another hard-hit bird fell headlong behind us. Soon the geese began to pass over in large numbers, but the majority came too high up for our shoulder-guns, or passed over too wide. In the course of half an hour all was over, but we had no reason to be dissatisfied with our sport, as we had then bagged nine brent, and a tenth, which we did not get, was picked up by some fishermen to windward of us.

Owing to their strictly marine habits, brent naturally afford the best sport to the punt-gunner, and in his trim little gunboat he may follow them day by day in their various haunts with some hope of success. On the vast expanse of mudflats and open water, where they feed and rest, they occupy a position of great tactical value for defeating the punt-gunner's aims and ambitions, more especially when his movements have to be carried out within full view of their keen eyes. For days together, perhaps, these wary birds will scarcely allow a punt to approach within a quarter of a mile of them. Then suddenly some startling and unaccountable change takes place in their demeanour, although seemingly the conditions are precisely similar, and they will allow him to steal close up within range of them. There is, indeed, no rule or method of reckoning to guide the fowler to the successful accomplishment of his task; but, since there always exists the possibility of obtaining a shot even when prospects appear most hopeless, the gunner need never feel discouraged by a series of failures.

Experience convinces me that a small low-lying punt which shows but little of her sides above water is better adapted for the work than a bigger one, which sits high on the water; and, when a gentle breeze ruffles the surface, the outlines of a low-lying

punt are certainly far less noticeable against the surrounding greyness of the sea. Then, again, prompt decision is necessary in selecting a propitious moment for stalking brent in a punt. Obviously, when the fowl are hungry and busily intent on their food, when every neck is craned downwards to tear up the sea-grass, which they love, and even the sentinel birds seem careless of their responsibilities, an opportunity arises which should not be lost. But let it be remembered that any mismanagement of the punt, such, for instance, as would be occasioned by a sudden deviation of the punt's direct course, would be fatal to your chance when drawing within shot. A long stalk in the open is, moreover, much more likely to succeed than a short one, and it may be taken, as a general rule, that the more exposed the ground is which the geese occupy the longer should be the distance at which the fowler must lie down to 'set' to them.

At many of our fowling stations competition is so keen among gunners, and the geese are so shy, owing to constant disturbance, that long and random shots are often taken at the geese with big mould shot in the hope of securing one or two victims at almost inconceivable distances. The effect of this misguided policy is only too apparent; for after the geese have

been with us but a few weeks they become suspicious of anything which floats, and no one can approach within half a mile of them. Neither art nor wisdom can be discovered in such a practice, and every time this folly is committed the geese become wilder and more difficult of access. I am well aware that it is sometimes hard to restrain oneself from trying a long shot at the big 'gaggles' when they rise again and again just out of range of the gun. But this is not punting as fowlers understand it. Far better would it be to wait for the few real chances, which will assuredly from time to time occur, when the fowler at length succeeds in deceiving the sentinel birds by his stealthy approach and creeps up to the main body of the revellers.

The critical stage will then have been reached when he must decide at once whether he will fire at the geese as they sit or when they rise up from the water. In nine cases out of ten a flying shot answers best, as geese rise slowly and horizontally into the air. The target presented by their bodies and wings will come fairly within the shot circle, and while the top pellets kill the upper birds which have already sprung, the bulk of the charge will strike home just when their wings are first extended in flight. In the case of a very small number of birds a sitting shot

will sometimes give the best results, because scattered groups of geese seldom rise in a cluster. I remember on one occasion obtaining a fine shot of forty-three brent out of a gaggle of two or three hundred, which were sitting in extended formation along the edge of the mudbanks. As I glanced along my gun barrel, and saw the forest of necks in front of me, the temptation to take them sitting was irresistible, and being in a position to shoot up the line I considered I was justified in doing so.

A flying shot at brent necessitates careful 'timing.' One second too soon or too late in pulling the trigger may make all the difference between a heavy shot and a comparatively poor one. It is, however, by no means a simple matter to aim and fire a punt-gun exactly at the right spot and at the right moment, and errors of judgment in this respect are not uncommon even among old and experienced gunners. Brent are tough birds, and need a heavier blow to drop them than widgeon or ducks, so it is customary to use shot rather larger in size and heavier for the purpose. Generally speaking I have found the most serviceable load for geese contains from thirty to forty pellets to the ounce, which corresponds very nearly with AAAA shot manufactured by Messrs. Walker & Parker. Some fowlers use SSSG—

about seventeen pellets to the ounce—when birds are wild and restless, this being a pattern which is of course most deadly at long range. Although I have but a limited acquaintance with the use of heavy mould shot, I was once induced to try a charge of it (about twelve pellets to the ounce) at the brent by way of experiment. It was not, however, a fair test of its power, as on that occasion, to my utter surprise, I succeeded in getting to close quarters, and instead of bagging thirty or forty, which would have been the case with my usual load, the shot merely cut a thin line through the gaggle, and I had to console myself with a paltry aggregate of thirteen birds only.

In some places brent geese are easier to approach on the ground ebb, and particularly is this the case when, by reason of tempestuous weather or other causes, their feeding-grounds have been submerged by the tide for a longer period than usual. After the weary hours of waiting their appetites become so sharp set that they will abandon themselves to their meal with an utter disregard of consequences. Again, on an ebb tide, late in the afternoon, before the geese quit their feeding-grounds for the night, the same absence of caution is frequently noticeable, and a diligent fowler should not fail in availing himself of this grand opportunity. Some of the most notable

shots I have personally obtained in open waters I attributed to the fact that the gaggle contained an abnormal proportion of young birds. The juveniles, as I found afterwards by the 'pick-up,' were often on the outside of the main body, and, being presumably less vigilant than the older birds, they did not seem to recognise the danger until escape became impossible. I have also observed that when geese have pitched in open water, and whilst in the act of swimming towards the flats to feed, they are often assailable. By allowing the leading birds to reach their feeding-ground and begin to eat, the main body of the gaggle will, in their eagerness to join their comrades and share in the good things they have discovered, confidently follow them like sheep, scarcely casting a glance to right or left to see whether the coast is clear of enemies. Among other instances which I could give, I recollect that one January evening, at dusk, I punted close up to the flank of a large gaggle, consisting of, perhaps, one or two thousand birds, all swimming heedlessly up to the open flats. From my recumbent position I could almost distinguish the feathers of their wings and breasts, and I verily believe I might have approached even nearer had I desired to do so. The pick-up after that shot was forty-two geese.

Hitherto my remarks have been mainly directed to the consideration of punting to geese in the open. In some localities brent frequent feeding-grounds where, from the nature of their environments, they fall a more ready prey to the wiles of the punter. By way of example, on the west coast of France there are many small islands and patches of rugged rocks, in some of the principal bays and estuaries, which are partially surrounded by mudbanks and clad with a green verdure of sea-grass at low water. As a background from which to approach the brent these islands and rocks often served my purpose admirably, and, when wind and tide were favourable, I must have killed many hundreds of geese in these resorts every winter. In most places a certain amount of cover is also obtainable from the mudbanks at low water, against the edges of which a punt will appear an inconsiderable object if the sea is smooth, and does not cause the craft to rock on the wavelets.

Methods which succeed in one locality may, nevertheless, be doomed to failure in others. Several times I have obtained shots by concealing my punt in a creek at low water near the mouth of some big bay, and killed the geese as they crossed my bows when flying low down against the wind on their way to the mudbanks inside. Occasionally the brent

will submit to be driven past the fowler's hidden battery by an assistant, if conditions of wind and tide are favourable, and the drive is so arranged that they must follow a course which they are accustomed to take when passing to and fro between their feeding-grounds. The area of mudflats, however, is often so extensive that it is impossible to calculate with any certainty what direction the geese will take when put up. By way of variety, it is a good plan to try to sail down on the geese, and in a fast punt this is undoubtedly a very pretty and exciting form of sport with a minimum of exertion for the fowler. The rough and tumble of a choppy sea makes aiming the gun a difficult matter, and the birds are often high up in the air before the muzzle can be brought to bear on them.

Like other wild-fowl, brent are very susceptible to coming changes in the weather, and both before and after a gale they will sometimes sit well to a punt. I have a vivid recollection of a certain dark, dismal day in the winter of 1893, when I had magnificent sport with the geese. The weather that day went from bad to worse, and the sea in the main channels at length became so heavy that our retreat homewards seemed seriously threatened. The brent were strangely confiding, and in a few hours I fired four

shots, bagging eighty-one birds, besides several others which were temporarily lost at dusk and recovered next morning. The gale on that occasion lasted three days and nights with but one short lull. Although these are, of course, ideal moments for goose-shooting, it seems from the records in my diary that brent are by no means inaccessible in fine settled weather, provided that they occupy ground suitable for approaching them. In one week under these placid conditions I have entries which show that I killed as many as three hundred birds, and the same thing occurred at other subsequent periods when I was shooting. In 'dead' calms the punt looms up too large, and throws too much shade on the glassy water to enable one to approach geese, and they show, moreover, a tendency to scatter widely over the flats, which gives them greater scope for their observations.

During thick fogs brent scarcely utter a sound, and are very hard to find. Possessing a strong abhorrence of this type of weather, and being extremely sensitive of its advent, I have observed that they frequently betake themselves to the open coast from motives of safety some hours before the fog sets in. If, however, by any chance they are overtaken by it, they seem to lose themselves entirely, and in

their bewilderment I have seen hundreds of geese flying about over the chimney-pots of some village which has barred their passage to the open sea.

In severe frosts brent probably suffer less than other fowl, as they can pick up a fair living on drift weed in the open water, and with their long necks reach the submerged blades of vegetation growing on the outer edges of the mudbanks which remain unfrozen. In 1880–81, and again in February 1895, the large masses of ice which blocked some of their favourite bays and settled over the flats deprived them of their means of subsistence, and, consequently, in their straitened circumstances, thousands were killed in a few weeks by the punt-gunners. Their plight must indeed have been desperate when it is stated that, at one of their principal rendezvous with which I was acquainted, they resorted to fields of cabbages near the coast and devoured every atom of green food which they could find there.

All wild geese are credited by some fowlers with restricted visionary powers at night; but I have not the least doubt that brent can see any suspicious object in the dark quite as well as widgeon or ducks. Now and then one may observe them sitting silent and motionless on the shallows under the moonbeams, and although it is probable that many of them

may betimes indulge in a short 'nap,' the sentinels can usually be relied on to recognise any threatening danger.

Owing to their gregarious habits some phenomenal shots have been made at brent by punt-gunners. The Essex Blackwater, for instance, which has long been celebrated as a haunt for geese, furnishes an illustration of the immense numbers which are occasionally killed on the coast. On this fine estuary the gunners usually combine their chances in making a descent on the geese, and fire at them by signal. Incredible though it may seem, several hundred birds have been obtained by the simultaneous discharge of a number of big guns at them by night when massed on the mudflats at the mouth of the Blackwater. In Christy's 'Birds of Essex' the author gives a detailed description of the way in which these marvellous shots were achieved. The late Colonel Russell, he says, who was an accomplished and enthusiastic punter, almost invariably took command of the flotilla when engaged in these exciting operations.

In the Cromarty Firth, Mr. J. G. Millais states that some years ago one gunner bagged in six weeks 1,800 of these fine fowl, and, more recently, another gunner killed two hundred in a week. It must be remembered, however, that such bags are rarely made

excepting in winters of great severity, when the natural wariness of the brent is in a measure subdued by hunger. Hardy though these geese are, there is a limit to the physical endurance of even the toughest birds when placed on short commons for a protracted period.

Individual shots numbering from forty to fifty brent have been made ; but I possess no data which show that more than fifty-two have ever fallen to one discharge of a punt-gun in home waters. This was obtained by Sir Charles Ross, Bart., in Cromarty Firth during the severe weather of February, 1895 ; and I also killed exactly the same number on the west coast of France with a gun shooting 16 ounces of shot. Ten or a dozen brent are now considered a very good shot under ordinary conditions on our coasts for a single gun, and the fowler's skill will oftentimes be taxed to the utmost ere such results are obtained.

SHOOTING THE DUCK AND THE GOOSE AFLOAT BY NIGHT

BY

W. H. POPE

WILD-FOWLING AFLOAT BY NIGHT

FEW British sports demand a more complete surrender of self to the exigencies of the moment than that of wild-fowling, and particularly is this the case when it is followed at night. The ever-varying conditions of tide, wind, moon, and stars are the fowler's constant study, and no opportunity is lost which may possibly be turned to good account. Personal considerations should, in fact, be made subservient at all times to his sport, otherwise he can never hope to attain success. Generally speaking, however, a wild-fowler is a sportsman to the core, and does not hesitate to accept the hardships and uncertainties of his craft with equanimity. 'The love of wild-fowling,' says Mr. Abel Chapman, 'is no commonplace sentiment, such as the keenness that field sports are wont to excite in the youthful breast. It is something beyond all that—an overmastering passion that neither difficulties nor obstacles can resist, nor even age and disability wholly quench.'

Towards the end of the seventies, fortune favoured me with the friendship of a keen and enthusiastic fowler who possessed all these characteristics in a marked degree. Many were the happy hours we spent together in 'flighting' the ducks and circumventing the waders and shore birds which haunted the mud-banks of a well-known estuary on the south coast. Of the fascination of fowling with the big gun I was then quite ignorant; but one November night the chance arose for my initiation, and I gladly availed myself of my friend's offer to accompany him on a cruise in his punt.

The experiences of that night, though novel to me, were in other respects cheerless in the extreme. Not only did we fail in discovering any audible or visible sign of a duck, widgeon, or teal throughout the length and breadth of those dreary wastes of ooze, but to complete our discomfiture we were subjected to a chilly drizzling rain, which set in soon after we embarked and continued incessantly all night long. For several hours we sought refuge under an old boat turned bottom upwards on the shore, and from these draughty quarters we emerged towards dawn in a more or less bedraggled and pitiable condition. I began to have serious doubts whether the game was really worth the candle; but these memories were

destined to be effaced by a series of adventures the same winter which caused me considerably to modify my first impressions of punting, and indeed made me eventually a devoted follower of the sport.

Wild-fowl were unusually abundant, and one fine, frosty night we had the good luck to obtain two excellent shots at widgeon and sheldrakes. Several of our crippled widgeon were strong runners, and before we could catch them they succeeded in gaining the shore and disappearing down some rabbit holes in the sand banks. With the 'makeshift' implements at our command we had much trouble in digging them out, and it was not until day broke that our task was accomplished. The wind was then blowing strongly, and things being generally unpleasant we put in for shelter under the lee of a Dutch ship which happened to be lying at anchor off a jetty near by.

We had not been long there, however, when a sad mishap occurred. In reaching over the stock of our stanchion gun to procure some edibles for breakfast, our oilskins fouled the trigger, and the next instant a pound of shot went hurtling through the ship's timbers at a range of, perhaps, two feet from the muzzle, leaving a wide, splintered gap as a tell-tale to all beholders. Fervently praying that no one was aboard, and that the mischief might thus remain

undetected, we continued our breakfast. Vain hopes, alas! were these. Hardly had the smoke of our gun cleared away, when several of the Dutchmen clambered up on deck in great alarm. They were only partially attired, and with their long flaxen hair waving in the breeze they presented a very wild appearance. Amid excited gesticulations and a volume of Anglo-Dutch, we gathered that the whole charge of shot had passed close over their heads as they lay asleep below, but, fortunately for us, no personal injury had been inflicted. This welcome information, however, did not relieve the tension of the situation, which soon reached an acute stage. Our first thought was to escape; but as we saw the Dutchmen had already manned their dinghy to cut off our retreat, it seemed wiser to stay and see the matter through. A long parley with the captain ensued, in the course of which my companion calmly suggested that as the catastrophe was brought about by a pure accident no English Court of Law would award him more than fourpence by way of compensation. I could not repress a smile at the audacity of his contention; but the captain remained obdurate, and refused to be cajoled by such views of English justice. Eventually a compromise was concluded, satisfaction was given for the damage done, and we

were allowed to proceed on our way to discuss the unhappy episode at our leisure.

Comparatively few amateur fowlers punt by night, and, indeed, the pursuit is not uncommonly regarded by the inexperienced as a bitterly cold amusement which you are not justified in following unless you are blessed with a skin like a rhinoceros and the constitution of a Polar bear. Popular fallacies die hard; but I am not aware that night punting is in any way more arduous than other forms of sport which necessitate the relinquishment of personal comforts, and the submission to a certain amount of inconvenience and privation. A man who is physically sound and robust, and suitably clad for the work, will find in night punting a most exciting diversion when wild-fowl are abundant. There is, moreover, a weird and romantic side to these midnight wanderings. The feeling that you are alone with Nature in one of her most beautiful and impressive moods, the inspiriting notes of the various kinds of fowl, which are the only sounds that break the stillness of the night, and the opportunities which you have for prying into their secrets, and watching them, all unconscious of your presence as they paddle about, and splash, and fight, within, perhaps, a few yards of the punt, are all attractive features of the sport. On the other hand,

I freely admit that if one is compelled continually to turn night into day—as is the case with some of our professional gunners, who earn a living by fowling—the element of downright hard work does seem to exist in a particularly trying form.

Broadly speaking, widgeon, wild ducks, and teal constitute the night punter's mainstay, and of these widgeon are by far the most numerous and show the best sport. Wild ducks, there is reason for thinking, are quite as plentiful in many parts of our islands as they were five and twenty years ago, thanks to the stricter enforcement of the Wild Birds' Protection Acts. During the autumn and winter months both ducks and teal may frequently be found in small 'bunches' by night, tucked away in remote corners of our salt-water bays; but they do not come to the tide in any great numbers until their inland haunts are frozen up in the depth of winter. Being naturally lovers of fresh water they show a decided partiality, even on the coast, for feeding near any running stream, whether river or brook, which empties itself into the sea. Pin-tail are at times also shot by night when mixed with widgeon or ducks; but the diving ducks, being mainly day feeders, usually go to sea before dark. Curlews, waders, and plovers will also probably cross the fowler's path at night when least expected, but he will

doubtless disregard their presence when in quest of the more highly-prized duck species. Wild geese are seldom seen in our bays and estuaries after nightfall, but on the Essex coast heavy shots have from time to time been recorded on the great Blackwater flats during severe winters. The only locality in which I have personally observed brent on the flats by night was in western France, where the bays which they frequented were so wide and exposed that they must have felt themselves as safe as on the open sea.

Under favourable conditions the most wary and vigilant fowl are more accessible by night than in the daytime, and a punter who thoroughly understands his work can then steal upon his victims unseen and unsuspected. One of the chief difficulties with which he has to contend lies in finding his fowl in the darkness, and in locating their exact position prior to putting his plan of attack into operation. Widgeon are, perhaps, more talkative than other species of the duck family at night, and it is their loquacious disposition which renders them an easier prey to the prowling gunner. Generally speaking the punter is first attracted to the spot where the fowl are assembled to feed by their incessant cries, which are audible at a considerable distance in calm weather, and on bright

nights they will be easily visible in the broad path of light cast on the water by the moon.

A skilful fowler is continually on the alert, and keeps his eyes and ears open in anticipation of discovering some indication of the presence of his quarry; for the smallest noise may convey information of the utmost importance to his success. When creeping about, too, in a punt at night, the importance of being on the *qui vive* is sometimes forcibly brought home. Strange developments may occur in the dark, and in a locality where gunners abound, who are afloat in search of fowl at all hours, there is the possibility of running into unforeseen danger unless the rules of night punting are strictly observed. Once, and once only, I am thankful to say, have I been covered by the big gun of a fowler at night; but I well remember the unpleasant sensations which thrilled through me when I saw my rival's punt gradually approaching nearer and nearer to a large company of widgeon which were feeding on the shallows directly between us. He was 'setting' to them from one side of the bay, whilst I was coming out from the opposite and more shady point. Being under the loom of the mainland I do not think he could possibly have detected my punt, nor could I escape out of range of his gun. The situation was a terribly anxious one,

for at any moment he might have pulled the trigger, and I must have been killed. On the spur of the moment I shouted to him at the top of my voice, which at once elicited a startled cry from his lips. As he afterwards told me, he had not the remotest idea of my presence, and my shriek of alarm fairly took his breath away. The danger was thus fortunately averted; but had I hesitated for a second I should probably not have related this experience.

Night punting is obviously not a sport in which novices have a right to indulge, and no one should embark on expeditions of this kind who has not previously received full instruction in the art from some capable and experienced gunner. In some places the local fowlers are wont to add to the ordinary risks of night punting by burying themselves and their punts in the mud at low water on the chance of obtaining a shot at any fowl which may drift in towards their lair on the rising tide. On a rough, rainy night, some five winters ago, the life of one of these hole-in-the-mud men was for a few moments in considerable peril, though no blame could have been attributed to either my punter or myself had an accident happened.

We were sitting ashore, sheltering ourselves from a heavy storm of wind and rain, and awaiting the turn

of the tide to proceed homewards, when several hundred brent geese flew by overhead, and, after circling round, pitched close to the edge of the mud-banks which lay between us and an adjacent island. Under the faint light of the moon we could see their black forms on the shallows, and as soon as the flood-tide began to 'make' we pushed off to stalk them. Beyond the geese on the dark mud a curious black excrescence attracted our attention, but neither my puntsman nor myself could satisfactorily explain it. It did not move, nor had it the appearance of life. Whilst we were cogitating as to what this object could be, the geese suddenly flew up, and soon we saw what proved to be a man standing upright in his box-like punt, busily engaged in pushing it over the ooze towards open water. Doubtless he had been lying buried in the mud for hours, heedless of such discomforts as wind and rain, on the chance that the geese might come to pitch near him. Providentially all ended well; but, had the geese remained, there is no knowing what might have happened.

In speaking of the risks to which the midnight punter is exposed, I should also emphasise the imprudence of operating during the hours of darkness in a locality with which you are not perfectly familiar. The prospect of being left high and dry on the mud-

banks by an ebb tide for several hours on a cold night owing to your topography being faulty, and the possibility of being swept out into some dangerous tideway against which you would be powerless to propel your punt, are weighty matters with which you must earnestly reckon. One learns, of course, these things by experience, but risks are often undertaken without calculating their full extent at the time. With due caution and judgment, however, punting by night ordinarily involves few risks, unless you happen to be caught in a fog, in which case you will require all your wits to find your way home, and this, even though you may know your ground thoroughly well in clear weather.

Favourable nights for punting are few and far between. Sometimes the wind blows so freshly that you cannot hear the cries of the fowl or ascertain their whereabouts; and at other times, though the night may be in other respects favourable, the light is often insufficient for you to see them when within fair gunshot. According to my 'Wild-fowl Diary' it seems that, during three consecutive winters, suitable nights for punting averaged fewer than thirty each season, reckoning from the early part of December to March, whilst in mild winters, when stormy weather and fogs were very prevalent, the occasions on which

we could go afloat with any prospect of success were still fewer.

Calm moonlight nights are generally considered the most propitious for the sport. A gentle breeze, nevertheless, which causes a slight ripple on the deep water but does not blacken the shallows where the fowl are feeding, is by no means a disadvantage, and if the wind blows towards you as you face the moon so much the better, as you will then be able to hear their cries and also see the fowl on the water under the moonbeams. It is a golden rule in night punting that your quarry must be approached from the darkest and most shady point which circumstances will permit you to choose. In acting thus the form of your punt is less liable to detection in the dark water astern, whilst the birds themselves, being on the light side and in the open, will be clearly visible before you draw within gunshot. Any departure from this method of procedure would be sheer folly on your part and lead to certain failure. Supposing, for instance, you were to attempt to approach the fowl with the light in any degree astern of you, they would inevitably notice your punt far out of gunshot, and although you might perhaps hear them flying up in all directions ahead of the punt, you would, when peering into the gloom, scarcely see a single bird which flew. A background,

too, of some kind, on a clear, bright night, adds materially to your chance of success; and in this respect I have often found that the dark shore-line, hills, rocks, mud-banks, or even a cloud low down on the horizon, have rendered some assistance when stalking fowl in the open.

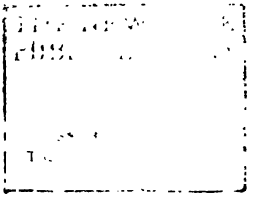
Tide, wind, and other conditions being in your favour, the best time to seek for a shot by moonlight is undoubtedly when the moon rises a little before midnight, her phase being then near the last quarter. In the path of light you will be able to distinguish birds on the glistening shallows, and the punt will be more in shade than under a full or three-quarter moon. Many times in the course of a long punting career I have likewise obtained sport under a full or three-quarter moon which was veiled in clouds. The light afforded by that luminary on cloudy nights is more subdued and evenly distributed all around, so that fowl may be stalked from any point which happens to suit your convenience. Few fowlers are aware how easily on a moonlight night a fowling punt can be detected on the water by birds when viewed at a certain angle of light, owing to the 'flash' of its sides and decks. This is of course obviated when shooting under a clouded moon; for you may then twist and turn your punt about without any fear of alarming the fowl by

the 'flash' of your punt or the glint of the gun-barrel.

Now and again the night may be too calm and bright for punting. Under a full vertical moon the surroundings are almost as clearly visible as by day, and there is practically no shade from which you can stalk birds. Many instances occur to me when on such nights I have striven in vain to approach large masses of widgeon on the open shallows, and if I did ultimately push my punt in shot, it was usually due to the fact that the fowl had changed their position to my advantage, and alighted near some background which favoured my operations. One very clear, still night in particular, I remember 'setting' to a vast assembly of fowl, mainly composed of cock widgeon, whose chief occupation seemed to be to watch and wait for the first sign of the approach of my punt, on observing which they at once flew up and went off to other parts of their feeding-grounds. After 'setting' to them from four different directions without the least prospect of success, luck suddenly turned, and I eventually bagged over forty of them when they finally alighted within about a hundred yards of a small patch of rocks which afforded me excellent cover for stalking them.

A trained ear and an intimate acquaintance with

UNDER THE BRIGHTENING DAWN. BRENT GEESE



the manners and habits of wild-fowl are absolutely essential for the night punter. In Mr. Folkard's able and instructive work, 'The Wild-Fowler,' there is a chapter on the 'Language of Wild-fowl' in which the author gives admirable advice on this point. He says:—

> The fowler should be able to know by the talk of the birds whether he may approach them without exciting suspicion, when he is suspected, and when they have thrown off their alarm. It may require years of experience to become familiar with these signs and expressions, but when once learnt the punter reaps his reward in the extra success which attends his exertions.

With regard to the particular conditions under which fowl seem most accessible at night, everything depends on the state of the tides, wind, and moon. Old punters know perfectly well that there is a right and a wrong moment to stalk fowl at night, even as by day. Widgeon, and other birds of the duck tribe, do not usually pack on the sides of creeks and channels at night, so they must be sought for on the shallows when the tide recedes from the mudbanks, or when it again flows slowly over them. During the period that the mudbanks lie exposed by the tide, although one may hear them calling in all directions, it is almost impossible to see birds on these dreary

black wastes. The case is very different, however, when a few inches of water cover the oozebanks, for the shallows then show in silvery whiteness, and small objects become comparatively easy to outline.

On moonlight nights you may occasionally approach birds on the rising tide by following the windings of some creek which intersects the mudbanks at a convenient point; and should you then have the luck to find them massed together under the moonbeams on the last uncovered patch of ooze, you may have a chance of realising an ideal shot. More often than not, however, circumstances are adverse. Sometimes, perhaps, the unfavourable direction of the wind, when it blows from you towards the fowl, will enable them to discover your presence by 'scenting' you,[1] and at other times it may happen that the intervention of a large tract of mud between you and the fowl makes it impossible to approach them within long range. All these points must be carefully considered ere the scheme of attack be finally decided upon.

Likely spots in which to find fowl at night are in the vicinity of high patches of mud that are the first to be exposed and the last to be covered by the tide.

[1] As to this, differences of opinion exist among the most experienced wild-fowlers.—ED.

At the hour of evening flight 'trip' after 'trip' of birds may be heard flying up to their feeding-grounds, but they will not collect together in large numbers much before midnight. In many of our overshot harbours widgeon do not 'flight' to their feeding-grounds, when the moon is full and clear, until the tide is about to leave the mud. Frequently I have heard considerable numbers of widgeon and ducks passing overhead from the coast into harbour even at nine and ten o'clock at night when the tides have been late. In less disturbed quarters, where fowl are enabled to acquire a strong 'haunt,' they will often visit the same mudbanks nightly, if the state of the tide permit them to feed there. Towards the end of the season, however, I have observed that this habit is subject to some modification, and owing possibly to the fact that the best of the weed in their old haunts has by then been consumed, they begin to use other ground where it would have been futile to look for them in early winter.

Punt-gunners hold different views respecting the advisability of shooting widgeon and ducks on the ebb tide, many being of opinion that it is bad policy to do so before they have settled down and fed for several hours. There are, however, certain advantages which are worthy of notice when shooting on the

ebb. First, widgeon are always more noisy, and easier to find, just before the tide exposes their food. Secondly, they are so hungry and intent on getting the earliest possible touch of the weed, that they are less likely to notice the approach of your punt. Thirdly, when the tide still covers the mud to the depth of a few inches, subject, of course, to lunar and wind influences, you can choose the best point from which to approach them. On the flood tide this is often impossible, and you must, perforce, follow the windings of the creeks, which, as I have already pointed out, seldom intersect the mud at a suitable place for obtaining a shot. Lastly, there is one other point in favour of 'ebb' shooting, and that is, if you fail to secure a shot on the ebb there is yet another chance with the knowledge then acquired of doing so on the flood tide.

On many parts of our coasts I am aware that the level and creekless character of the ooze banks renders the practice of fowling on an ebb tide a hazardous operation, in view of the fact that the fowler, through inadvertence, may be left high and dry on the mudbanks by the receding tide. Where this is the case he must try for a shot as the tide flows over the mud. Loth to take wing after their hearty repast, birds often sit well to a punt, more

especially in cold weather, when they huddle and crowd together, eagerly devouring the last mouthful of weed before the tide overwhelms their feeding-grounds. Great caution is necessary, however, when 'setting' in to birds on a rising tide, and it is most essential, before an approach is attempted, that it should be ascertained whether there is sufficient water to float the punt up in shot without the risk of sticking fast on some intervening hummocks of mud in full view of them. A mistake in this respect may result in a night's labour spent in vain, for the birds will certainly notice any effort to push the punt over the obstruction, and when once their attention is attracted by any struggling movements there remains small hope of a shot. A rising tide, birds usually thickly massed on the higher muds, and plenty of time to collect the spoil without fear of going aground and seeing the victims escape, are all factors which make for good sport; and, yet, in some of our bays and estuaries, where fowl are being continually harassed, it is sometimes most difficult to get a shot on this tide. In these places birds know the danger so well that, long before the tide is sufficiently high to allow a punt near them, they leave their feeding-grounds for the open water.

During white frosts, and particularly in a dead

calm, when a deathly stillness pervades the scene, widgeon are unusually silent and restless when feeding at night. On several occasions I have been so misled by their silence that I have paddled my punt almost in shot of them without having the least idea of their proximity until they began to rise up from the water in front of my punt. At long intervals the sentinel birds may give the fowler a hint as to their whereabouts, and if his ear be quick to locate the direction from which the sound proceeds he may at length get near enough to hear the 'clatter' of their bills as they dabble in the shallow water. Immediately their suspicions are aroused, however, they cease feeding, and listen and look around for any confirmation of their alarm. The least noise or movement which he may then make at this critical moment will set them on the alert, the sentinel birds will immediately whistle their warning note, and the whole pack take wing. On the other hand, if they neither hear nor see anything to render them uneasy, they may again settle down to feed and eventually allow him to approach them.

The question may naturally be asked—How can you take proper aim at fowl when shooting by night, since oftentimes you cannot see whether the sight of your big gun bears high or low on the birds unless, of

course, the moon is very bright and clear? Authorities on wild-fowling have recommended different contrivances by which you may be enabled to take a full sight on fowl by night, such, for instance, as india-rubber rings fastened on the muzzle of the gun, a patch of white paint round the sight of the gun, &c.; but, personally, I cannot say I have found them of much service in actual practice. To avoid any uncertainty it is best to lay the gun on the wooden gun-rest before nightfall, at such an elevation that the shot will sweep the water from twenty up to a hundred yards from the muzzle. This is an old-fashioned system, but I believe it is still the most practical. In my humble opinion it is a mistake to fire these big guns from hand by night, and as flying-shots are seldom taken, excepting, perhaps, at geese, a 'set' gun, which you know covers the fowl at a certain range, will give the best results. Circumstances may, of course, arise when it becomes necessary slightly to alter the elevation of the gun-barrel in order to shoot fowl at closer range than was anticipated; but this can ordinarily be accomplished with the aid of the gun-rest.

For night-shooting many punters use comparatively small-sized shot, such as Walker & Parker's No. 1, or single A—averaging from sixty to seventy pellets to the ounce; and as the distances at which

fowl are usually fired at by night are much shorter than by day, this size will perhaps be found the most serviceable.

In the foregoing pages I have endeavoured to give some hints and suggestions in regard to the practice of night-punting, and by way of illustration I am tempted to narrate briefly the incidents of one of those memorable nights with fowl which at rare intervals fall to the lot of the fowler. I quote from my 'Wild-fowl Diary,' and I should state that the events described occurred on the French coast, where I had been an annual visitor for nearly ten years.

'It is the night of January 1, 1893. The sky overhead is clear and thickly bespangled with bright, twinkling stars, whilst a nipping keenness in the air most surely portends the continuance of a frost which has now lasted nearly three weeks. The scene is one of great beauty, and its features are familiar to most wild-fowlers. The moon has just risen slowly above the horizon and cast her soft radiant beams over the rippling sea. Outside her silvery path of light a few small islands loom up dark and dreary-looking above the sea-level, whilst around the bay the shore lies enwrapped in a crystal-white girdle of snow and cats'-ice. From the top of a rocky promontory, where we take our stand, we can see and hear

the great sheets of thin ice under the snow jostling and crashing against each other as they drift past on their way downwards to the open sea. Ashore, the voice of Nature seems hushed in sleep, but it is otherwise on the coast, where the wild-fowl world is evidently wide awake. The cheery notes of the widgeon as they call to each other, the long-drawn "quacking" of the mallard under the shore, and the harsh cries of the brent in the distance are heard on every side, and as the feeding-hour draws near their acclamations become more and more noisy. The prospect, so far as we are concerned, could not look rosier, for the bay is full of birds, and as we go aboard our trim little double punt and stow away the gear in its proper place, our hopes of a good shot run high. The wind blows directly from under the moon towards us, and the cries of the widgeon are distinctly heard as they leisurely swim up towards the higher muds, where they will first obtain food.

'Hugging the high land of the shore as closely as water and ice will permit, we paddle round inside the bay and lay up our punt in a snug corner, out of the wind, from which point we can observe the course of events. Through the glasses numbers of black-looking objects, easily recognisable as widgeon by their buoyancy on the water, may be seen bobbing

up and down on the little wavelets, some swimming hither and thither in search of drifting tit-bits of weed, whilst others, more impatient, are plunging and standing on their heads in their endeavour to reach the submerged weed now almost within their grasp.

'As we watch this animated picture the shallows near the shore appear whiter and whiter, and so we must prepare to take our chance at the fowl which are now quickly concentrating in dense masses within our view. A thunderous roar of wings from the darkness causes us some little uneasiness; but it is only another fine company of widgeon, which we had not noticed, flying up from the outside to join their comrades. In a few seconds they pass under the moonbeams, and down they all go among the others. Now is the fateful moment which shall decide the fortunes of the night!

'Pushing out from our ambush, and keeping low and well out of sight at the bottom of the punt, we glide gently forward to a small patch of rocks which lies directly between us and the widgeon; once its welcome cover is gained and the shot will certainly be ours. There is just enough water to float us within range, and as we approach nearer, yard by yard, in breathless suspense, every nerve and muscle

seems strained to its utmost. The splashing and dabbling of the fowl, together with the continual chatter of widgeon music, creates a perfect pandemonium almost bewildering to our senses. Still we go forward, and whilst my fingers instinctively clutch the trigger halyard, we pass the coveted rocks and leave them astern. Suddenly all is still. The stragglers on the outside have seen us, and the alarm has been sounded. Up they spring, clean and lightly from the water; but it is too late for the main pack, as I instantly pull at the big round patch in front of us. A bright flash, which momentarily dazzles the eye, a mighty report as the sound of our gun echoes and re-echoes round the shore, and through the dispersing smoke we see a long lane of floating bodies lightly reposing on the water with their upturned breasts glistening white in the moonlight. A few strokes with our paddles and we begin to gather the victims to right and left of the punt. It was a close shot, and, cripples being few in number, we have little difficulty in accounting for them.

'By this time the tide has gone off fast, and the crest of the dark mud is visible in many places, so we must perforce retire at once down the tortuous creek astern into open water. Fate, however, has yet other favours in store for us. On our way down harbour

another, somewhat scattered, pack of widgeon, which are quietly feeding on some shallows in a corner of the lower mudbanks, allow us to creep within range, and a further handsome addition of brilliantly plumaged birds is made to our already well-filled punt.'

Such is the record of one of the best nights I ever experienced when punting abroad, and one indeed which for sustained excitement could not be surpassed. On our own coasts, of course, excepting in winters of the most severe type, the punter's rewards are on a smaller scale ; but whether the bag consists of a dozen head of fowl or of fifty, the fowler will feel just the same keenness, and be just as contented, if he be satisfied that he has made the most of his opportunities. The same outlay of patience, skill, and endurance is required in making a small bag as in effecting a big shot.

There is, however, another side to these midnight sketches. Sometimes, despite the most untiring patience and perseverance on our part, luck will set dead against us and nullify our most skilful efforts. Let us remember, for instance, that night when the wandering curlew on ghost-like pinions flew silently over the creek in which we were lying prone in our punt awaiting the flowing tide to carry us in shot of

perhaps at least a thousand widgeon. For the nonce we think we are unnoticed; but, alas! our hopes are soon to be shattered, as the piereing cry of alarm, to which this wary bird gives utterance on disappearing into the darkness, is at once recognised by our quarry, and with their departure *en masse* vanishes our last chance for the night. Then, again, can we forget how often the distant flash of the rival fowler's gun, or the 'tramp, tramp' of the shore gunner as he prowls along the pebble-bound coast in the silence of the night, has driven up fowl when almost within gun-shot? Such misfortunes, it is true, are hard to endure, but they do not discourage the true fowler. He knows that in punting, perhaps more than any other sport, he is the victim of many unforeseen circumstances which may upset all his calculations, and therefore he accepts his fate, good or bad, as it comes.

Many fowlers think that the light of the stars alone is not sufficient for shooting purposes. With this view, however, Colonel Hawker evidently did not agree, for he says that 'bright starlight is the very best of all times for getting at birds as the tide flows over the mud.' In the open waters of Poole Harbour and the Solent, where he chiefly punted, there would probably be no great difficulty

in seeing fowl on the starlit shallows; but much depends on the natural surroundings of the locality in which one is punting, and the numbers of birds which one is likely to fall in with. A few scattered ducks feeding under a high shore would scarcely be visible on a starlight night; but no one gifted with ordinary vision could fail in making out a large pack of widgeon densely grouped together in the open. When the sky is clear and bright overhead and the horizon free from haze, birds may frequently be shot on the open shallows; but I confess that, in my experience, it is not such an easy matter to see them in small sheltered bays.

The starlight shooter, however, seldom reaps the full reward of his shot, even under the most favourable conditions. At close range, of course, those of his victims which lie within a few yards on either side of the punt will be gathered; but, outside this limited radius, many will drift away in the darkness and be overlooked unless additional assistance is obtained in searching for them. In a locality where shore shooters abound the coast is regularly patrolled in the early morning by these and others, who doubtless find the shortcomings of the punt-gunners in this respect a source of considerable profit to them. Some idea of the extent of the losses which

may occur in starlight shooting may be gained from the following experience. Some winters ago I made a shot in a small shady bay near my fowling quarters. After carefully looking round for some time, twenty-eight widgeon, including dead and crippled birds, were gathered, and, as far as I could ascertain, these were all that fell to the gun. Passing near the spot, however, on my way homewards in early morning, I noticed an object rolled up in the weeds under a wall to leeward of the place where I had taken my shot. Closer inspection confirmed my first impression, and it proved to be another of our widgeon. Thus encouraged to persevere in my search, I actually picked up no fewer than fourteen more birds, which had drifted in shore with wind and tide, and would otherwise have been inevitably lost.

Professional gunners, who from long experience by day and night are acquainted with every inch of the ground over which they punt, sometimes shoot by guess—that is to say, they fire at the noises created by feeding fowl rather than by sight. These guess shots are, however, seldom satisfactory, and birds are generally farther away on calm nights than they seem to be by their cries. Moreover, it requires no great effort of the imagination to attribute to inanimate objects the semblance of fowl when the

widgeon are piping on all sides and the gunner's nerves are apt to be somewhat highly strung. On our way home, one night, I remember once being attracted by the whistling of some widgeon, which were vigorously calling in a small bay under the mainland, and having experienced a run of desperately bad luck, my partner and I determined to try to find them. Punting cautiously round the shore, we presently drew in range of what we supposed were the birds. Raising myself gently above the stock of the gun, I observed water on the far side and myriads of little lumps scattered about in the shallows. I could make out no change in their outward appearance and no movement; but, on whispering to my man, we both decided that what we saw were birds. At length I fired at them, and, though it is true the widgeon flew up all round us from among the lumps in question, not one bird had we touched. In reality our supposed birds were nothing but small stones and ragged rocks covered with seaweed, the widgeon themselves actually being further inshore.

There is one period of the night, or perhaps I should say morning, when an early-rising gunner may sometimes recoup himself for many blank and profitless days in pursuit of fowl. In the grey dawn,

on a rising tide, widgeon and ducks will frequently assemble in large numbers over the fast covering flats, and offer an excellent opportunity for making a heavy shot. By approaching them with the dark shades of night astern of you, they will be clearly outlined under the eastern light, whilst your punt, coming towards them from these shades of night, will be hardly visible in the gloom. After a hearty meal overnight, however, widgeon and ducks will on calm mornings often fly from the mudbanks at the first glint of day, in order to wash and plume themselves in the deep water prior to the morning flight to their diurnal resorts. Such a contingency is always present, and may defeat your expectations of a shot unless you can get on terms with them before they have become dispersed in small groups here, there, and everywhere. This has been my experience on so many occasions in one locality where I used to shoot that I speak with some feeling on the point.

Several of the most notable shots at fowl in home waters have been obtained at daybreak, and as recently as January 1901, Sir R. Payne-Gallwey, Bart., tells me that he succeeded in bagging seventy widgeon at one shot on the west coast of England. This is probably a record for one gun in England or Wales, whilst, in Ireland or Scotland, it is many years since

such a fine shot at widgeon has been made. There is also an authenticated record that on one occasion, about forty years ago, three gunners, shooting together by signal, bagged eighty teal and two ducks one morning at daybreak in Poole Harbour; and Mr. J. G. Millais informs me that even heavier shots than those mentioned have been obtained in the Scottish firths by night or in the early morning.

Night punting being, as I have already said, a form of sport principally followed by professional fowlers, it is not surprising that information regarding record shots is somewhat scanty. Many amateur fowlers do not punt by night, for the reason that they dislike groping about in the dark, and prefer to have their game under observation from start to finish. Nevertheless, when the conditions are suitable and sport is indifferent by day, night punting can be confidently recommended as an effective means of filling the bag and realising in some degree the fowler's ambition.

SHOOTING THE DUCK AND THE GOOSE ON CONTINENTAL WATERS

BY

W. H. POPE

SPORT ABROAD

THERE is a popular belief current among wild-fowlers that, owing to various causes, the numbers of migratory geese, widgeon, and ducks which winter with us have been steadily diminishing for many years past. To some extent, no doubt, the climatic conditions prevailing in northern and eastern Europe, whence our supply of these birds is mainly drawn, have influenced their abundance or scarcity in certain seasons; but from time immemorial these unequal visitations have always been noticeable. During protracted frosts, when the winter is very severe beyond the North Sea, and the whole of western Europe is affected thereby, wild-fowl are probably as abundant now as ever; but in mild winters there is frequently a deficiency in the supply.

The records given in Colonel Hawker's 'Sporting Diary' afford valuable and interesting information concerning the state of wild-fowling in this country

at the beginning and middle of last century. Reference therein is constantly made to the dearth of fowl in the Solent and Poole Harbour, and the striking contrasts in the bags which the Colonel obtained from 1820 onwards bear eloquent testimony to the vicissitudes of the fowler's lot in those days. Interspersed among entries relating to his more notable successes one finds such statements as these: 'In 1838–39,' he says, 'the scarcity of fowl was lamentable, a general failure of all sport on the coast; whilst the geese appear to have been banished therefrom altogether.' Then again, in 1846, he writes: 'Such an unprecedented scarcity of wild-fowl at Keyhaven on the coast that I could not disgrace myself by putting a great gun afloat. A general complaint all over England that there were no wild-fowl, woodcock, snipe, and other winter birds this season.'

Coming to more recent times, we find that things have not changed much either for the better or worse. Amidst a long series of disappointing seasons there have nevertheless been a few glorious exceptions, when fowlers have achieved some gratifying results. In the severe frost of 1880–81, 1890–91, and again in 1892–93, thousands of geese, widgeon, and ducks were killed in these islands; whilst in January and February of 1895 the firths of North Britain and

the bays and estuaries on the west coast of Ireland swarmed with geese and widgeon.

In consequence of the persecution to which they are subjected in public waters wild-fowl are probably much more shy and wary nowadays than they used to be, and in open weather they resort largely to those inland sanctuaries where they are but seldom molested. The casual sportsman, who rambles about the country with his dog and gun, declares there are no ducks because he does not see them; yet a mile away, perhaps, in some snug retreat, ten thousand fowl may be passing the day in peaceful security.

In view of these facts it may be interesting to inquire how our neighbours fare on the Continent, where many of the natural haunts of fowl have been preserved in spite of the inroads made by civilisation. In his instructive work on wild-fowling, Folkard remarks that 'Wild-fowl have always been more abundant in some foreign countries than in England, and it is natural that migratory birds should be more inclined to settle in wild and thinly populated lands than in such as are thickly inhabited and avariciously cultivated as those of England.' There are, however, other potent reasons which would account for the abundance of wild-fowl on the coasts of Denmark, Germany, and Holland, not the least important of

which is that these countries lie on one of the main tracks followed by migratory fowl when flying south and west in autumn and early winter, and that the natural features of the coast line distinctly favour their selection of these routes. Coast lines, in fact, are the recognised highways of migration followed by hosts of birds throughout the world, and in the large bays and estuaries which are to be found in these countries they are enabled to obtain plenty of food for their needs on the journey.

Alluding, in the first place, to the conditions of fowling in Germany and East Holland, we find on looking at the map that between the chain of islands off the coast and the mainland of these countries there are vast sandbanks, and in some parts there is apparently no lack of suitable weed for wild-fowl. So long as these feeding-grounds remain open they are visited by geese, widgeon, and ducks in immense numbers; but when frost sets in the bulk of the birds temporarily quits the locality, returning, however, again on the break-up of the frost to their former haunts, where they stay until the end of March or the beginning of April. That well-known and experienced wild-fowler, Captain G. J. Gould, late R.E., to whom I am indebted for some extremely interesting and useful notes connected with wild-fowling

in this part of Europe, tells me that he does not remember any winter when there was so little ice that fowl could stop on the coasts of Groningen and Friesland throughout the season. In an average winter, he says, numbers of wild ducks seemed to find sufficient food for their maintenance; but if the frost became too severe, they moved to places where the winter was less rigorous. Teal are more quickly affected by frost than any other of the duck species, and a slight spell of cold frequently brought about their prompt disappearance.

In the Lauwers Zee and at Holwerd, and various other resorts of fowl between the mainland of Holland and the islands, there are some splendid feeding-grounds In the autumn of 1895, however, the weed failed on the Holwerd banks, and though brent and widgeon were seen on passage as usual, very few stopped in the neighbourhood. No less attractive to the vast numbers of fowl which visit the coast of Schleswig-Holstein are the extensive banks lying off the Island of Nordstrand. Hereabouts there is not much mud, but in the Dollart, between Groningen and East Friesland, a large amount of it exists. The sea-grass (*Zostera marina*), however, does not grow either on the sand or mud in the Dollart, and widgeon are consequently rare visitors, though wild ducks and

teal are extremely plentiful. It was here that in the autumn of 1897 Captain Gould says he killed 951 teal in twenty-three days' shooting.

Grey geese are likewise very abundant inland in Groningen and Friesland, but their visits to the coast are most irregular. Sometimes they will come out to the tide just before sunset, and if they are much disturbed at their feeding-grounds they may appear at any time of the day. The Dollart is another favourite haunt of grey geese; but, as they chiefly remain on the Quelders, which is a partially reclaimed foreshore, they do not give the coast gunner much chance of shooting them. Brent geese, on the other hand, congregate in big gaggles on the coast wherever the broad-bladed *Zostera marina* grows. Again, around the Island of Wieringen, and on the banks to the north-east of the Griend, which is an island lying between Harlingen and Terschelling, they are most numerous; but in these exposed situations brent are always difficult of access. It is worthy of note that all the brent geese which Captain Gould shot in these places were of the dark-breasted variety. Most of the geese on the east coast of England are of this kind; but it is no uncommon event to bag specimens of both the white and dark bellied variety at the same shot. On the Moray and Cromarty Firths

in Scotland Mr. J. G. Millais informs me that the brent killed in these localities usually belong to the light-breasted type (*B. Glaucogaster*).

Widgeon begin to arrive at Groningen and Friesland about the second week in September, and by the fifteenth of that month there are enough birds for the punter to start operations. It is not, however, until about September 25 that the geese and widgeon arrive in the immense numbers that are to be seen at times on the banks at Holwerd and around the 'Griend.' September 22 was the earliest date at which Captain Gould says he saw a great migration of widgeon, and the passage continued in greater or less intensity at uncertain intervals until the middle of December, according to the period at which the frost set in. Three or four large migrations of fowl occur in a season; but no doubt many birds pass in the night that are not noticed. On November 8, 1889, a vast migration of widgeon took place, and thousands pitched in the Lauwers Zee, near Dokkumer Zyl. Being anchored at that time on the Dokkumer Diep he went afloat in his punt before daylight next morning, naturally expecting to secure one or two fine shots. Not a bird, however, was to be seen, as they had all departed in the night. On

many subsequent occasions a similar thing happened, so that it may be concluded that widgeon migrate early in the night and arrive at their destination during daylight. The migratory habits of brent resemble those of widgeon, but the brent do not seem to travel so much by night. Widgeon usually remained in the Lauwers Zee and at Holwerd for a fortnight or three weeks, and sometimes even for a month.

The excellence of the sport which is obtainable on these coasts with the punt-gun may be gathered from the following details taken from Captain Gould's 'Wild-Fowl Diary':—

In 1894–95 his total bag was 1,453 head, comprising: wild ducks, 52; widgeon, 1,119; teal, 197; pintails, 29; grey geese, 38; black geese, 14; and goosanders, 4. The four best days were from October 2 to October 6, when he fired six shots and bagged 315 widgeon.

In 1897–98 the bag was 1,808 fowl. He was afloat on forty-three days and fired 67 shots, the best shot being 121 widgeon, on November 4, in the Lauwers Zee.

The following season, although the total did not exceed 1,478, he obtained some of the most remark-

able shooting ever achieved with a punt-gun. The entries in the 'Diary' read as follows :—

1898. October 11. Lauwers Zee. One shot, 149 widgeon.
„ November 11. Lauwers Zee. One shot, 105 widgeon and 17 teal.
„ November 29. Dollart. One shot, 132 teal.

These marvellous performances were accomplished with a gun firing 32 ounces of shot—75 pellets to the ounce—and six ounces of powder. The fowl were collected by himself and punter without assistance, and no birds were counted which were not picked up on the spot and brought home in the punt.

Shots exceeding one hundred birds are so rare that it is instructive to learn the conditions under which they were obtained. Captain Gould says :—

When the shot of 149 was got the widgeon were placed to perfection on a steep sloping bank. From the lowest birds to the highest the distance was not more than six feet. The pack, however, did not contain an unusually large number of birds, nor were they so placed that I could fire along the line. The other shots were taken at fowl on gently sloping banks, but at close quarters, the range being about fifty yards.

He adds that, although he has fired each year in Holland at many similar packs of widgeon, the shots were generally taken at ranges varying from seventy to

eighty yards. In the light of these remarks, therefore, it would seem that close quarters and medium-sized shot constitute the recipe for making a heavy bag of fowl. Many years ago, Captain Frank Dowler also obtained some exceptionally fine sport on the German coast, and with a gun firing only fourteen ounces of shots he succeeded in bagging 264 head of widgeon, ducks, teal, and bernacle geese in one day. He says that it was impossible to get properly up to the bernacle geese, as the punt was too low in the water with the weight of fowl aboard. His duck-shooting average that year was 31·5 birds per shot.

Following the line of the coast round we now come to South Holland. The characteristics of the Dutch estuaries in South Holland are huge sandbanks with soft ooze interspersed among them, and great tidal marshes of alluvial deposit, covered by spring tides, but having enough grass on them in the vicinity of the sea walls to run a few sheep occasionally. Through these sandbanks a few channels permeate, in which a punt can be worked for an hour or two at high tide. The food on the Dutch coast is not so abundant as in some of our English resorts, but a certain amount of *Zostera marina* grows on the mudflats, and no doubt the birds take advantage of it. They seem to pick up a good deal of sustenance

on what appears to be bare soft ooze; but it must be remembered that in the Netherlands the whole of the surrounding country is below sea level, and of a nature to provide food in abundance, excepting in times of severe frost.

Probably no English sportsman has had such a long and varied experience in this country as Mr. T. M. Pike. During the past fifteen years, from 1883 to 1901, he has spent two months every season in pursuit of wild-fowl, both with the shoulder and stanchion guns, and since 1894 he has held a lease from the Dutch Government of the Veere Gat, one of the finest estuaries on the coast. In compliance with my request, Mr. Pike has kindly supplied me with full information regarding his sport in South Holland, which I give *in extenso* below:—

In the Dutch waters (he says) it is not the great numbers or the possibility of making enormous bags, but the charming variety of the fowl one meets with, that lends a fascination to the sport in South Holland. There you may expect to frequently come to terms with grey geese, which are rarely seen on most British waters, or, if seen, not to be approached, as Mr. Chapman tells us in his excellent work. Then the mallard is nearly as common as the widgeon. For instance, in 1885–86, out of a bag of 1,135 wild-fowl, no fewer than 325 were wild ducks, widgeon numbering a little over 500. Pintail ducks are common, so are teal, and shovellers are not rare.

At Veere, before the era of protection, gunners were in the habit of incessantly poking their small punts through the marshes, and at low tide crawling about in sea-boots, armed with shoulder-guns. This, of course, broke up the natural haunt of the fowl, and drove them to the open sea, so that in mild weather scarcely any were visible throughout the estuary. After the protection, which began in 1894-95, a very different state of things soon became manifest. Birds collected all through the autumn in increasing numbers, and were visible by day and every day, both on the marshes and on the edges of such of the sandflats as were not too near the shipping traffic of the navigable channel. Not only did the number of the fowl increase but the number of species also.

Having got your fowl together in numbers, punt-shooters would naturally ask how can they be brought to bag, and have you reduced punt-shooting to the level of ordinary game shooting, that is, to a certainty? This, however, is a practical impossibility. There may be, and in fact often are, some two thousand duck and mallard on the Veere Gat marshes all the winter, but far out of reach, scattered about over five or six square miles of saltings. In no place would the discharge of a punt-gun realise more than half a dozen birds. Many more could be killed with a shoulder-gun by knocking them down as they jump up, often close to the punt, while working through the devious creeks in the marshes. But this kind of thing would inevitably break the haunt of your fowl if carried out on any scale. Your mallards must, perforce, be left alone, until the stern hand of winter causes a change in their habits.

One does fare a little better with the widgeon. They

are not so desperately fond of the reedy marshes, and they will occasionally, just after low water, collect together in tempting companies on the edge of a sand-bank and perhaps give a chance of a shot. As an example, on January 3, 5, and 6, 1900, my note-book records 122 wild-fowl, of which 96 were widgeon obtained in two shots with the punt-gun. This occurred in mild open weather with a light southerly wind. The effect of frost on the habits of widgeon is somewhat curious. The covering of their feeding-grounds by ice, and the difficulty of procuring food appears to give them a fright, and if a frost sets in the following winter, the birds, apparently remembering the last year's hardships, leave Holland *en masse*. This state of things, however, does not last long, their fears quickly subside, and in a season or two widgeon will be as plentiful as ever throughout the Dutch water-ways during the whole winter.

In addition to the ordinary fowl, grey geese may often be numbered by thousands at Veere, and as frost is by no means necessary for sport with them, something can always be attempted provided the weather be fine enough.

Providence has an occasional way of frowning on new undertakings, of which the dismal series of mild winters since the opening of 1895 is a case in point. In that year the severity of the frost closed the shooting early in February, the amount of ice in the tideways rendering it impossible to get a punt afloat. Thus, with one winter much too severe, and six equally unfavourable from an opposite cause, a just estimate of the results of protection can hardly be formed.

As it was, the bag of fowl for the period mentioned

amounted to 2,727. In recent years, 1901 showed a short period of favourable weather in January and a week in February, which may be quoted as a fair sample of what may be done at Veere:—

1900–01

Widgeon	297	Teal	22
Wild Duck	121	Pintail	16
Geese	65	Various	9
Total	530		

These birds were killed in twenty days' shooting from a single-handed punt, and seven of the best shots produced 163 wild-fowl.

The avifauna of Holland includes practically every kind of goose and surface-feeding ducks, besides the diving and sea ducks and smaller fry in the shape of waders and shore birds. The Berwick swan, Mr. Pike says, he has never met with; but the Hooper and Scandinavian swans are, in severe winters, seen together in large herds when the Danish lagoons and the Zuider Zee are frozen up. Among the grey geese the bean and pink-footed species are the most numerous, and he has obtained as many as 48 pink-footed geese with the punt-gun in one day, 26 falling to one discharge.

On the Haring Vliet estuary, which is almost

entirely fresh water, greylags are common. Mr. H. Leybourne Popham, who has visited these parts for many seasons, says that these birds sit very badly to a punt-gun when ashore, but good chances often occur when they are swimming on the water, a habit to which they seem more addicted than any other species of grey geese. Sometimes, by hiding behind a 'dyke,' they may be driven overhead from the meadows where they feed, and in this way Mr. Popham says he once killed seventeen of them in two days. The habits of all grey geese become modified by various circumstances. If fog, for instance, comes on overnight, and remains thick at daybreak, the geese stay on the sands, but if the thick weather lasts for forty-eight hours, not a goose will be found there on the second day, as they will take any risk to avoid compulsory starvation.

Speaking of the bernacle and brent geese, Mr. Pike also relates a fine shot of 40 at the former species on the Krammershe Slikken, and after the break-up of the great frost in 1891 he bagged 120 brent in four days at Brouwershaven and the Roggen Plaat. As is their custom in France, the brent do not leave the Dutch estuaries by night for the open sea.

Wild-fowl in Germany and Holland are captured

in vast numbers in the decoys, which are constantly working near the coast. Recently considerable friction arose between the decoy owners and the punt-gunners, with the result that a Government inquiry was held, and the use of the punt-gun was prohibited on public waters. The decoy owners wilfully misrepresented that Dutch wild-fowl were being destroyed in a wholesale fashion by English gunners, quietly ignoring the fact that for every English there were at least four Dutch gunners, poor men, who earned their living by the pursuit of wild-fowl in winter. In the course of the inquiry the fact was elicited that whilst some 80,000 fowl were taken in the decoys, the total obtained by all the gunners did not exceed 4,000 in the previous year.

The true reason of the decrease in the takings of the decoys is, first, their numbers, greatly augmented during the last thirty years, and, secondly, the huge reclamation-works carried out from time to time. Of such, the Harlemmer Meer is an instance, where in one fell swoop 100,000 acres of swamp, lake, and reed-beds were converted into corn-land. Rumour has it that a scheme has also been propounded for the reclamation of the Zuider Zee, which, if carried out, must have far-reaching consequences on bird-life in the Netherlands.

On the island of Föhr, off the coast of Schleswig-Holstein, there are five decoys, which about fifteen years ago usually took from 60,000 to 70,000 teal in a season. In the neighbourhood of the decoy, on the sandbanks between the island of Ameland and the mainland, no teal are ever visible; but it is a curious fact that two or three sacksful of these birds are daily caught in the decoy itself. It almost seems as if there were a continuous migration going on so high up that one cannot see them, and that these little ducks drop directly into the decoy from the skies.

Leaving the Netherlands, and passing down the coast of Belgium, which offers few attractions for migratory fowl, we come to the shores of Northern France, where we again find ourselves in a wild-fowl country.

In France the *chasse au gabion* (hut-shooting) is the favourite and most general method of killing wild-fowl, and it is similar to that which was adopted in Colonel Hawker's day. Having pegged down his 'call-ducks' in suitable places, the fowler retires to his artfully constructed hut on the confines of some inland lake or flooded meadow-land, and there patiently awaits the arrival of the ducks, which come to feed or rest within a few paces of his lair.

M. le Chevalier Lorenzo Dastis, a wild-fowler of note living at St. Valéry-sur-Somme, tells me that this system of hut-shooting is most productive at night, and on certain occasions from fifty to sixty duck, teal, and pintail have been bagged between sunset and sunrise. The best sport, however, which he obtained was in 1879 at the big lakes of Pologne.

Owing to the strength of the current in the river Somme, which at spring-tides often exceeds six knots, fowling from a punt in the bay of the Somme is fraught with considerable risk. The usual practice, therefore, is to shoot the fowl at low water when they fly off the sandbanks to the main channel. Some sportsmen also dig holes in the sandflats and having placed straw therein conceal themselves behind from fifteen to twenty stuffed birds, which they have previously set up in some convenient pool of water in front of them so as to attract the wild ones. In his experience, although he has shot in many places, M. Dastis says that, excepting perhaps at the mouth of the Orne, near Ouistreham, he has never seen more fowl, both as regards quantity and species, than there are in the bay of the Somme during the winter, and their numbers are, moreover, considerably augmented when the spring migration begins.

Although, generally speaking, the northern coast

of France may be deemed too rocky and sandy for geese and ducks, there are nevertheless several places where the feeding is good, and the locality otherwise attractive to fowl. Colonel Hawker speaks very highly of the district between Cherbourg and Carentan as a wild-fowl resort; but I have been unable to obtain any authentic information as to its merits as a fowling-station in these days.

Undoubtedly some of the finest and most extensive feeding-grounds on the west coast are to be found in the Gulf of Morbihan, and thither large flights of brent geese and widgeon wend their way during autumn and winter. For nearly ten years, under the auspices of some French friends, I have shot in this gulf with extraordinary success, and using it as a centre I occasionally explored other parts of the French coast down to the river Loire. Both brent and widgeon seemed to follow the coast-route coming south in early winter, and for some days prior to their appearance in the Morbihan they might be observed in the Bay of Quiberon on the open coast. An easterly wind, however, drives them on a lee shore in this bay, and when it blows hard from that quarter they at once fly into the gulf for shelter and food.

In his 'Bird-Life of the Borders,' Mr. Chapman states that brent were sometimes numerous in the

Bay of Arcachon, but he did not notice any there himself nor on the north coast of the Peninsula during a winter's fowling. A few, perhaps, may wander down to Arcachon, and even further south; but the principal southern rendezvous of these geese is, I believe, the Gulf of Morbihan. There they are to be found in tens of thousands after the first week in December, and at certain times and seasons they assemble over the zostera-clad ooze banks in dense masses. During severe winters widgeon were quite as numerous as the brent, but we were not necessarily dependent on weather influences for our stock of these birds, for there were always several packs in view on any rough day, even in the mildest weather. Something unusual must, however, have occurred in the autumn of 1893. The season had been so open in the north that comparatively few fowl came to the Morbihan at the regular epoch. A partial failure of the weed on their favourite feeding-grounds may possibly have driven them elsewhere in search of food; but, whatever was the cause, on December 20, when I joined Captain Gould at our quarters, the scarcity of geese and widgeon was unprecedented, and, in fact, he had fired but six shots during the whole of the previous month. Early in January, a few days' frost completely changed the aspect of affairs, and we

then had brent and widgeon in plenty, with a fair sprinkling of ducks and teal. The worst season I ever experienced in the Morbihan was in 1897–98, when I was afloat practically every day for six weeks and only succeeded in bagging 357 head for nineteen shots.

The opinion which I had formed of these grand punting-grounds was naturally a very high one; and no wonder, when it is stated that in 1890–91, with a small gun firing 16 oz. of shot, we killed 1,425 brent, widgeon, and mallard; in 1892–93, with a gun firing 32 oz., 2,061 in eighty-five shots; and in 1895–96, 1,794 in sixty-eight shots. The staple fare provided for fowlers in the Morbihan was brent and widgeon, for in three seasons of frosty weather the total bag of mallard and teal did not exceed two hundred.

To show the quality of the sport to be had under favourable conditions I may cite that memorable winter when, although the punt was under repair for two days, between the last day of December 1892 and January 7, 1893, we bagged 455 widgeon and mallard in twelve shots, and again in the same number of shots between January 18 and 24, 1896, 400 brent and widgeon, of which 170 were brent and the rest widgeon.

With regard to individual shots, I cannot claim to

have in any way emulated the feats of Captain Gould in East Holland, though on three occasions we bagged from eighty to ninety widgeon at a shot, and once, I believe, we fairly stopped quite a hundred; but, owing to the approach of night, we were prevented from gathering all the cripples. The rotten ooze banks greatly impeded the operation of cripple-collecting, as it was impossible to walk over the mud without mud-pattens. The shore seekers and fishermen frequently had their picking; but so long as they did not interfere with our sport or disturb the fowl out of sheer spite I did not begrudge them their share of the spoil. On the numerous islands, as well as on the mainland of the gulf, there was a considerable population of fisher-folk and native gunners, all of whom had to be carefully handled, propitiated, and won over by friendly understanding in regard to the *chasse*. Eel-pickers and winkle-gatherers were another source of annoyance at low water, when they were to be seen at work all over the best flats, whilst fishing-boats, with parties of French *chasseurs*, firing bullets and mould shot at fowl regardless of range, were constantly crossing our path at critical moments. Under these circumstances it may readily be imagined that we often had to cut in and take a hasty shot

as best we could before the intruders disturbed our quarry.

The Morbihan was also famous for its coots, and it is difficult to believe there can be another place in the whole of France where they are to be found in such numbers. The native gunners regarded them with contempt when more valuable fowl were plentiful, but in the absence of the latter they frequently pushed their primitive-looking punts up the creeks at low water and shot the coots on the mud with their shoulder-guns. But even these birds soon learn wisdom, and after a few lessons they eventually become quite as wary as other fowl. The great saddle-back gulls, too, made coots their special prey, and it was one of the sights of the Morbihan to watch the 'scavengers' at work driving these terrorised birds into inky black masses at their approach. The sound of the splashing and diving coots might be heard for a mile or two on a calm day, and the blinding sheet of foam which they threw up as the gull hovered, hawk-like, over them and swooped down to select his victim, was a scene to be remembered. We once made a great shot at these birds as an act of revenge for the numbers of good chances they had spoilt for us by giving the alarm, when we were punting, to widgeon and geese on the three

previous days. The exact number we picked up was seventy-seven; but it is always hard to account for every one of these tough birds which may have been 'pricked,' but not placed absolutely *hors de combat.*

On the main coast outside the Gulf of Morbihan there are several places where brent geese and many of the game ducks afforded sport, and where the diving and sea ducks are very abundant. The mud-flats, however, lie rather low, and consequently the best time to shoot them is on the spring tides. In the Bay of Penaerf the natives use flight-nets, which are erected on the ooze banks to entrap the fowl at night; but they always seemed to be so unskilfully set that two widgeon were all I actually saw caught in them. Shore shooters abound on every rock and bit of available shelter, and at night punting is attended with considerable risks in the midst of a careless and excitable community.

The most southern fowling-grounds which I have visited on the French coast are at the mouth of the river Loire. The enormous bogs and marshes which lie on both banks of this low-lying coast, and the huge lakes which abound in this district, offer irresistible attractions to wild-fowl of the duck species. At night large numbers of wild duck, teal, and pintail usually flew inland to feed, and in the daytime they

either went to sea or drifted up and down on the tide in the river, mingled with the pochard, scaup, and other diving ducks. The port of St. Nazaire is a thriving shipbuilding centre, and it was a quaint sight to watch these sleepy fowl, many with heads tucked under their wings, and sometimes surrounded by a crowd of pochard and scaup duck, drifting past the entrance of the port, where the din created by a busy army of workmen must have been plainly audible to them. At low water the sandbanks lie exposed in different parts of the river, and occasionally I observed that birds would pack on them and give the punter a chance of a shot.

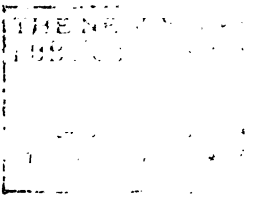
In January, 1894, I spent a few days with a friend at Méan, near the port of St. Nazaire, in trying to circumvent the ducks and teal of the Loire. A severe frost unfortunately set in shortly after our arrival, and the river soon became blocked with drifting pyramidical icebergs. Inland everything was frozen up, and the ducks and teal suddenly disappeared, leaving only the scaups, pochards, and diving ducks behind them in the river. One bitterly cold day, however, we managed to get a long shot with our punt-gun at some teal and widgeon mingled together on one of the sandbanks in midstream, but the water subsequently became so rough with the strong tide running against

half a gale of wind that our punt was several times in danger of being swamped. The leaky sailing craft which we had hired as a following boat nearly proved a veritable death-trap for us, and it was only by constant baling that we kept ourselves from sinking. All ended well, however, and we came ashore with a nice bag of twenty-four teal and widgeon, firmly resolving never to risk the experiment again unless we could secure a trustworthy skipper and a more seaworthy boat.

Grey geese sometimes come out to the sandbanks in the Loire to rest, but we did not see any during our short visit. Tame geese are reared in considerable numbers by the peasants in the Loire district, and in their habits and flight they closely resemble the wild birds. Serious mistakes might therefore easily be made by a gunner in an uncertain light, leading possibly to unpleasant complications with their owners; so we left the grey geese severely alone.

The wild-fowling records of the late Mr. Walter Crawshay on the rivers Loire and Allier have appeared from time to time in the columns of the 'Field.' In 1892 he seems to have had exceptionally good punting. His own bag comprised 579 mallard, 38 teal, 12 widgeon, and 7 pintail; whilst with the help

THE WELCOME THAW



of his son-in-law, Captain St. Clair, R.E., who killed 150 mallard in six days, the grand total for the season eventually reached 786 head. Of late years Baron Jaubert seems to have followed in Mr. Crawshay's footsteps, for it is recorded that, in 1894, he bagged 70 mallard in three days, one shot accounting for 31 ducks; and again, in January and February, 1901, eight days' sport resulted in a bag of 199 duck, besides a few teal and a smew.

Few men have better opportunities for studying the migratory movements of wild-fowl than the coast fowler. In his charming work on 'The Migration of Birds,' Mr. Charles Dixon gives us an insight into the mysteries surrounding this phenomenon. Speaking of the migration flight he says:—

> It varies a good deal. Some species habitually migrate by day, and may frequently be watched on their journey north or south, as the case may be, all the time that the sun is above the horizon. The great majority of birds, however, migrate by night, or if they do pass by day, it is above the range of human vision. Many species continue their flight along certain routes after the sun has risen; but, on the other hand, numbers prefer to rest for the day, provided they are on land, wherever they may chance to be, passing on again with the recurrence of darkness.

I have already briefly referred to the movements

of fowl during the autumn migration on the coast of Groningen and Friesland; but the following notes, supplied to me by Captain Gould, concerning the migration of brent and widgeon, in 1894, are so interesting that I need make no apology in appending them for the benefit of those fowlers who are not acquainted with these phenomena.

Parenthetically he says, prior to the date when his observations began there had been a passage of fowl and he had shot many widgeon. The migrations in other seasons were similar in regard to times and intensity, but the dates varied considerably according to the direction of the wind and other circumstances :—

HOLWERD-FRIESLAND

September 22, 1894.—At anchor off the coast in my yacht. Some small lots (10–12 each) of widgeon arrived to-day at long intervals. They began coming about 8 A.M., and the last I saw was about 5 P.M. A few lots of brent also arrived. Wind NN.E.

September 23.—A good many parties of brent (15–20 each) passed to-day. The passage started soon after daybreak, and ended about 1 P.M. No widgeon seen passing. One lot of grey geese (21) went west. Wind NN.E.

September 24 and 25.—A few lots of brent passed. Wind E.

September 26.—Some large gaggles of brent arrived

to-day. No widgeon seen coming, but there are a great many more here than yesterday. Wind S.E. last night and NN.E. to-day. A fresh breeze.

September 27.—Wind N.W., blowing very hard. A few small parties of brent passed.

September 28.—Immense numbers of brent passed to-day, beginning before 7 A.M. They varied in number from 10 to 60 or 70 in a lot, but towards evening they became larger, and the last two gaggles which I saw pass just before 6 P.M., comprised about 200 birds each. Hardly any widgeon seen passing, but there are more on the banks than yesterday. Wind N.E., fresh, squally.

September 29.—Passage of brent temporarily over; not more than half a dozen lots passed. Wind E. in morning, N.E. towards evening, and fresh.

The second large migration occurred in mid-October, and subjoined are his observations :—

October 14, 15, and 16.—Wind N.E., very fresh. Immense numbers of widgeon and brent passed on these days, chiefly between 2 and 5 P.M.

October 17.—Wind changed to W., and flight ended.

Again, on

November 15.—I left the yacht, which sailed to the Lauwers Zee. On the voyage my men told me that masses of widgeon passed; but in the Lauwers Zee they were evidently out of the 'Trek,' and they do not know how long the passage lasted. None of the widgeon, however, stopped in the Lauwers Zee.

At my fowling quarters in the Morbihan I have on several occasions witnessed the departure of widgeon and geese in March. Premonitory indications of an impending movement were generally afforded by the restless and uneasy demeanour of the fowl during the day. About twilight, one calm, moonlight evening, I saw large numbers of widgeon spring suddenly up from the sea and disappear in the dusk. In a few minutes they returned with an angry rush of wings, rather higher up in the air. A second circle was then made, and so on, until they were high up overhead and quite out of sight. Finally they headed north-east towards the mainland, and their passage could only be traced by their faint whistling, which was audible for some minutes until they flew out of hearing. The migratory movement in spring usually took place in fine, settled weather, and one of the most likely moments to see fowl depart would be at high water, just before dusk, when their feeding-grounds would not be exposed for several hours.

The British islands, no doubt, are well situated for observing the movements of migratory fowl which pass down our coasts, but there can be no question that, so far as the *anatidæ* are concerned, the neighbouring continental shores of Denmark, Holland,

Germany, and Schleswig-Holstein hold a distinct advantage in this respect, because of the extraordinary numbers which follow these coasts during spring and autumn.

Herr Gatkë, whose observations on the island of Heligoland cover a considerable number of years, testifies to the intensity of this migratory movement over the North Sea in spring and autumn; and there is certainly no more favourable spot for observing the passage of fowl than on this interesting little island. It is to be regretted that fowlers, as a rule, do not devote more attention to the subject of migration, and record their experiences in some systematic form in their diaries. For scientific as well as sporting purposes such material would prove useful and interesting.

COOKERY OF DUCKS AND GEESE

BY

ALEXANDER INNES SHAND

COOKERY

To the chilled gunner, ambushed with his shivering retriever at his side, there is no more cheering sound than the swish of the wings of the first of the ducks flighting from the sea to the feeding grounds. As pleasant to the ear is the quack of the mallard when you are stealthily following the course of the meandering stream and sight him with his soberly dressed consort beyond the bend, taking his pleasure among the speckled trout and skimming swallows. Set on sport as you are, it seems pitiful to trouble that scene of domestic felicity; but as these couples with outstretched necks and legs rise skywards in lumbering flight before getting into the swing, the barrels go off of themselves. There are heavy thuds as they fall among the sedges. Picking up the drake in the beautiful plumage, which he had been preening so proudly a few moments before, you feel almost as regretful as when you look in the reproachful eyes

of the dying roe. But there is another side to the question. Wild ducks, like all game, were created to be eaten, and remorse and sentiment are alike forgotten when you see them on the table, done to a turn, which means slightly underdone, and served in a piquant gravy of wine and spices. Wild ducks have hardly the justice done them that they deserve, but for that there is good reason. No bird, except, perhaps, the wild goose, is more speculative according to the species, the season, and the dieting. There is no comparison between a grouse from the Scotch moors and another from the Yorkshire Wolds, between the hill-bred and the home-fed pheasant, between the partridges of the wheat lands and those from the grass shires of the Midlands. But at the worst they are more piquant or more delicate than ordinary poultry. Ducks, on the contrary, according as they have fattened, may be exquisitely luscious or fishily detestable. The pheasant, the partridge, and the quail are the commonplaces of luxury in life and literature, figuring at the banquets of kings and the *petits soupers* of financiers. We seldom come across the wild duck, yet when we do, he is respectfully treated *en connoisseur*. Dumas, who prided himself on being a master of *cuisine*, makes his culinary *confrère*, the Regent Orléans, luxuriate in a *salmi*,

and when, in his 'Impressions de Voyage,' he went to a duck-chase in the Camargue, he personally superintended the dressing of the spoils. Walter Scott was no gourmet: he could not even detect when a haunch of venison had been overhung. But he tells sympathetically how Counsellor Pleydell, when he dropped in unexpectedly on the Mannerings at Woodburn, arranged, while taking off his wrappings in the hall, for a brace of Galloway wild ducks being added to the supper. And afterwards Pleydell gave us all a useful hint when he told the Dominie to tear off the wing, in place of slashing at the pinion. Anthony Trollope knew well how tenderly ducks should be treated. Though 'The Claverings' is a poor novel, a single episode redeems it by an exquisitely natural touch. Theodore Burton, a man whom his future brother-in-law dislikes and despises because he dusts his boots with his pocket handkerchief, retrieves his reputation by the thoughtful care he bestows on the dressing of a brace of wild ducks, 'preparing the gravy with pepper and lemon, having in the room a little silver pot and an apparatus of fire for the occasion.' It is to be hoped that the pepper was cayenne or Nepaul.

In England of the Anglo-Saxons, and under the Norman kings, wild-fowl rained down on the ceorls,

serfs, or yeomen, like the manna or the quails that fell in the wilderness. Except for cruel penalties on trespass, they were not under the forest laws. They were netted in the estuaries and snared in the swamps. The vast woodlands which stretched from the Channel to the Cheviots were interspersed with lakes and meres, and flooded by innumerable rivers and streamlets. The fenland, in special, was a prolific breeding-ground, where the home birds were reinforced by hosts of migrants. When Hereward the Wake established himself there in the Camp of Refuge, the hospitable Abbot of Ely would have been hard put to it, when he sheltered a crowd of noble refugees, had he not eked out the commons with fishes, eels, and wild-fowl. It is said, indeed, that in happier times the monks of the fens stretched a point, and served the birds of the waterland on Fridays and fasts, in the faith that they were as much fish as fowl. Since then drainage and reclamation have made melancholy changes. The greylag geese, which were wont to breed freely, have ceased to nest there, and the ruffs and reeves, which used to swarm, have become ornithological rarities. A glance at the *menu* of the Archbishop Neville's splendid installation banquet at York gives some notion of the numbers of wild-fowl in the North in 1467. There were 40,000 of

'mallards and teals,' and '200 dozen of the fowles called zees.' When the forester with crossbow went out to strike a deer he always carried bird-bolts in his girdle.

Friesland and Holland, with their wastes of waters, their polders and their canals, intercepted great flights of wild-fowl in their flittings from the North. The ducks were always a feature at the feasts of the jovial burgomasters, as we learn from the sporting trophies of Snyders and the dead-game pieces of many a painter. Voltaire had a weak stomach and poor digestion, which pointed his sarcasm and explained his cynicism; otherwise he would hardly have classed in his satirical adieu to Holland the *canards* with the *canaux* and *canaille*. And the duck is perhaps more generally diffused than any other bird. Ducks have helped the adventurous traveller or the hunter through hard shifts on the prairie, the steppes, and the tundras; and in Europe they have given the roving sportsman capital shooting, from the lagoons of Provence and the Pontine Marshes to the lakes of Albania and the isles of Greece. Mallard, widgeon, and teal swarm on the tanks of Hindustan, and we have heard an old Indian sportsman discourse voluptuously on the charms of the hunter's pot, an oriental variation on Meg Merrilees' cauldron. It was a favourite dish in the shifting encampments when a

party of friends were out after tigers or big game. It was a blending of choice scraps from all the game they bagged, with eggs and mushrooms, olives and truffles, working up, in the words of the tramps' landlord, in 'The Old Curiosity Shop,' into one delicious gravy. But my friend said what gave it its most delicious flavour were the breasts of the wild duck and the bosoms of the snipe.

Preservation on inland lakes and marshes, with the legislation for a close time, are again increasing the number of edible or succulent ducks. There is all the difference in the world when they have been feeding up for a few weeks on those inland waters. I have never found them more delicious than at a romantic country seat on the Aberdeenshire Don, where there was a hereditary breed of semi-domesticated ducks on the pond in the home farm-yard. They attracted others, who joined them in their daily meals of scattered oats, and they seldom strayed far. After a big shoot—and the shoots were very big there—there were always several brace of those wild aliens in the bag, and no game was more appreciated at the dinners. Thence it follows that the decline of the decoy has been a grief to the gourmet. Nothing is more attractive to the migratory squadrons than such strictly preserved waters as those

of Holkham or Netherby. But they are within sight and easy reach of the shore, and for that very reason the wild-fowl are oscillating hither and thither, regardless of correct dieting. Drawn to the inland decoys in East Anglia, they put themselves into gastronomic training like Alsatian geese, though under no compulsion. But what with drainage and reclamation, and financial reasons, the decoy has been disappearing. Railways have been driven through marsh and fen, and guns have been multiplied and cheapened. A hundred years ago there were thirty-nine decoys in Lincolnshire, nearly as many in Essex, and about thirty in Norfolk. Now there are but nine in the three counties. The Grange in Essex even now gives good returns, but not so very long ago it used to net thrice the number. Perhaps the most famous of all was that of Canvey Marsh, near Maldon in Essex. It was formed about the time of the Scottish Rebellion of the '15. The first day sixty-two birds were taken. In the four months of the flighting season for the first year the total takings were over six thousand. The enterprising speculator made a good thing of it, and netted 115*l.* clear. The most of the captures were the choicest of ducks—mallards, widgeons, and teals; yet owing, doubtless, to difficulty of transport, they went cheap, and teal and

widgeon, counted twenty-four to the dozen, sold for a trifle under five shillings.

There are surface-feeding ducks and there are diving ducks. It need hardly be said that the former are by far the best; but the worst of them is that, though voracious, which is well, they are omnivorous, which is unfortunate. As I have said, it is almost invariably a toss-up how any duck may taste. You bring home a plump mallard, and after gorging on grain he is all the heart of man could desire. On the other hand, another of as fair appearance may be little better than carrion; he has been 'groping in the gutters,' to borrow a phrase of Sir Mungo Malagrowther's, or he may have disinterred a heap of rotten potatoes and has been stuffing on that savoury treasure trove. Yet, take them all round, combining weight with quality, the mallards —properly the name is only applied to the male—claim to lead. The shoveller, which often breeds in Scotland, is also excellent on occasion; but the odds against the shoveller are longer, which is to be accounted for from their respective habits. The mallard affectionates running streams and purling rills; the shoveller is to be found in still pools and stagnant ditches, where, with his long and 'shovel' beak, he dredges for the tiny molluscs and foul-tasting larvæ. Talking of the flavour of the shoveller, I have always

had trouble between him and the teal as to their French relationship. At all the celebrated Parisian restaurants *rouge de rivière* was a standing dish. Many a time have I supped on one, after the theatre, at the Maison Dorée or the Café Anglais. For size and delicacy I would have sworn it was our British teal. But in sundry books on natural history I see it stated that *rouge de rivière* is the *sobriquet* of the shoveller, which in my experience is half as big again, and I should be glad if someone would authoritatively clear up the mystery.

As to the pretty little teal, you are safe with him; he is the gem of the duck tribe and the jewel of the spit. In couples the little darlings generally frequent the sedgy pool or the lonely tarn. But when you see a bunch of teal in the air, with any reasonable prospect of stalking them, the sight is not only beautiful, but delectable. Involuntarily you lick your lips if you have the luck to blaze off both barrels. Of the larger ducks, next to the mallard, one appreciates the widgeon, and, mingling with the widgeon on sea lochs and estuaries, are generally the pintails, not inaptly called the sea-pheasant; for of all the genuine sea-birds they have most of the woodland savour. The sheldrake is worse than useless for the table: the flesh is positively offensive; but in Holland they find a peaceful

home, for they are protected for the sake of the eggs, which are esteemed a great delicacy.

Among diving ducks the pochard has higher pretensions than, as I think, he deserves. He is akin to the renowned American canvas-back, though somewhat smaller, and *connoisseurs* have said that he has something of the flavour. *Credat Judæus.* He is a sea-frequenting bird, diving among the algæ and the shellfish, and there is a long way from such slimy seaweed as dulse and tangle to the luscious wild celery of Florida or Virginia. The scoter, always clinging to the beach, is rank, and his companion the merganser almost uneatable. Yet with the worst and most fishy of the diving fowl something may be done, by cutting away the oily backbone immediately after death. Even sea-gulls under such summary treatment taste rather like tainted beef, and so the frugal and ingenious Normans can make a savoury stew of the marrots. The birds are cut up, partly scalded : then the pieces are stewed with butter, gravy, spices, and savoury herbs in a saucepan, and simmered gently over a slow fire. The result would defy the diagnosis of an expert, but the Norman housewives, born cooks, have the supreme virtue of patience. Of all the divers, the scaup is perhaps the most impracticable, so it is of the less consequence that he is the most wary and

hardest to stalk. And by a beneficent provision of Providence the beautiful little golden-eye is worth almost as little for the larder. I never see a golden-eye without thinking of Scott's happy poetical fancy, when he makes Mordaunt Mertoun suggest that Cleveland, the pirate, may induce a Zetland golden-eye to accompany him on his southern migration.

The American canvas-back has a world-wide celebrity, though it fares sadly in refrigerating chambers, and is the shadow of itself on our European tables. Indeed, in Maryland, where it is a speciality of the border State, they sneer at the canvas-back as served at Delmonico's or the crack dining clubs of New York. Nevertheless, they are regularly exported in crates to Liverpool. Favourite transatlantic shooting grounds are leased to clubs of sporting epicures. They profess to tell the *provenance* of the duck as experts can name at a sip the years of the choice vintages of the Gironde. It is certain that the southern birds are as different as possible from those of Hudson's Bay and the bleak inlets of Arctic Labrador. There they are said by Audubon to be stringy and fishy, but the rich vegetable growth on the shoals of Florida, with the beds of wild celery, bring them to rare perfection. The pride of Maryland in particular, nowhere are they so

carefully dressed for the table. They must be closely watched in the oven: five minutes of excess means ruin. Twenty-two to twenty-five minutes is the time with a slow fire and a quick oven. After the duck is drawn, it should be wiped dry: water must never touch it, and it should be hung and seasoned before going to the fire. No blood should mingle with the gravy: it gushes out, and of the richest, at the incision of the knife. There is to be no slicing: each bird is halved. The *bonne bouche* is the triangle of meat, an inch thick, between the leg of the wing and the curve of the breast. Serve, says an authority, with dry champagne or burgundy, but as to that I shall have my own remarks to make. In Maryland or Florida the canvas-back pairs off with the terrapin, which precedes it. I cannot profess myself a judge, for I have never been in the Southern States. But I must say that, when exported to England, I find the canvas-back a much over-rated delicacy. One Christmas-day three of us dined at the Athenæum in absolutely solitary state. My *convives* were Herbert Spencer and Sir Edward Hamley, and both had travelled in America. The *plat de soir* was a brace of canvas-backs, sent specially from Key West, with a strong letter of recommendation. We all agreed that the ducks were a disappointment, and

regretted that we had merely trifled with the club turkey.

As to cookery of the European birds, if we look to the foreign schools we get little help—Brillat Savarin, I believe, has absolutely nothing to say about the wild duck. It is eminently unsuited to the light wines of the Rhine or Moselle, and I have never come across it at a German dinner table. But when I have bagged my own ducks in the Ardennes and had them cooked in the comfortable little hostelries of the country of St. Hubert, I have revelled over them as the dish of the evening, with a cobwebbed flask of burgundy. And at the Hotel of Avranches, overlooking the Bay of St. Michael, they had a notable speciality of wild duck, larded with bacon and stuffed with olives. Which reminds me of another delectable dish at Bordeaux, which was generally sent up without any ordering at the Hôtel de France, where the landlord was a *connoisseur* and the *chef* an artist. It was *foie de canard*—either tame or wild—*aux olives*, the only drawback being that it savoured somewhat too strongly of the *bourgeois cuisine* for the delicate bouquet of the best growths of the Gironde. It even did injustice to Léoville or Pontet Canet. At Avranches and Granville, by the way, the ordinary domestic ducks were delicious. Both towns in the

summer-time were embosomed in the bloom of roses, and the ducks were turned loose in the rose gardens to feed on the cockchafers that settle on the petals. Those particular beetles give a soft richness to the flavour, whereas the common cockchafer taints the flesh.

Among the many cookery books for guidance as to game of all sorts and practical recipes I am inclined to trust to Meg Dods. With wild-fowl especially, for they used to swarm in the watery wildernesses, and the Frenchman taught the Scot how to cook. When Caleb Balderstone robbed the Wolf's Hope cooper of his christening supper, Mr. Girder had a goose and a brace of wild ducks on the spits before the fire, the best part of the supper, as he ruefully remarked when he had lost them. For, after all, the best way of treating ducks is simple roasting, and here are Meg's instructions. 'Keep them at least three days.' That all depends on the weather, and in a hard winter three weeks would be nearer the mark. 'From twenty-five minutes to half an hour will roast them.' The longer time for mallards, &c., and less than the shorter for teal. 'Baste well, and dust lightly with flour to make them froth and look of a rich warm brown.' For the roasting, Cre-Fydd makes a good suggestion, as to previously rubbing

the liver on the breast till it is red. The only vegetable I should admit is celery, and that is more than doubtful. To vary with a *ragoût*: 'Half roast the birds. Score the breast, but not too deeply, and in each interstice put mixed spices and the juice of a lemon. Keep them hot, add a glass of wine and three finely-shred eschalots to the gravy and put it over the ducks.' Meg Dods adds that '. . . this is a dish of very high *goût* and prized accordingly,' and she recommends when carving the breast to put a little butter over it, and above that to squeeze a bitter orange. Indeed, as the butcher said emotionally of the steak he sold Tom Pinch, no game is better worth 'humouring' than the wild duck.

To hash cold ducks. Carve as at table, and let them soak till hot in boiling gravy, thickened with bread crumbs and seasoned with salt, spices, a glass of claret, and a spoonful of lemon or orange juice. Garnish with sippets.

For a salmi, the following is from a high French authority: 'Roast to the required point, without allowing to get dry. After removing from the fire, carve into five parts, thighs, two fillets, and a breast-piece. A hot salmi sauce is poured over the whole.'

Madame de Salis has a good idea in her 'Wild Duck *à la Serviette*.' 'Take a duck, remove heart,

liver, and gizzard, and mince them finely with three shalots. Sprinkle well with black pepper and a little salt. Mix into a smooth paste. Stuff the duck with this, sew it up carefully, then roll in a cloth and tie it up like a sausage. Then have a panful of boiling water and put in it the duck, which has been well salted. Let it cook for thirty-five minutes, and serve very hot. Garnish with sliced oranges and serve, with an iced orange salad.'

I have mentioned the Norman fashion of stuffing with olives, and Madame de Salis gives another Norman mode—*à la Renaissance*:—

Truss a duck; take the giblets, chop finely; add salt and pepper, a little ground allspice, a tablespoonful of butter, a piece of garlic the size of a pea, minced, the same of chopped parsley. Stuff with this, then roast briskly for half an hour—[that is too long?] take the dippings, add a little dark stock, and strain over the duck.

Lady Harriet St. Clair suggests a variation, as duck *à la Béarnaise*, surely strangely miscalled, for instead of the garlic being more *prononcé*, there is none at all. Garlic is the very essence of the cooking of Béarn and the Pyrenees: however, here is the lady's recipe: —

Stew in a little broth half a glass of white wine, a bunch of parsley, thyme, sweet basil, and small onions,

bay leaves, and two cloves. Put into another stewpan seven or eight large onions cut in slices with a bit of butter. Pass them on to the fire, turning till they get colour; then add a pinch of flour, moisten with the liquor the duck was stewed in; stew the onions and reduce the sauce; skim the fat, add a squeeze of lemon, and pour over the duck.

A salmi is as good a *réchauffé* as any, but if you care to refine in *entrées*, two recipes of Dubois and Soyer may be adapted from the pheasant for the duck.

Quenelles à la Financière:—

Prepare with a rich forcemeat, poached at the last moment. The force is of meat with half as much panada, fine butter, yolks of eggs, with salt and nutmeg; it must be poached a long time and passed through a sieve, with a little melted glaze and fumet of game. When the quenelle is moulded, it must be dipped in a buttered sautoir and ornamented on one side with small pieces of truffle. Garnish with a ragoût of cockscombs and truffles.

For fillets, the fillets are cut from the breasts, then beaten gently, trimmed, and larded with bacon. They are placed in a buttered *sautoir*, then larded with bacon, seasoned, masked with paper, and baked in a hot oven for seven or eight minutes, and when well glazed they are dished up in circular form, with a bordering of forcemeat and truffles, poached in the *bain-marie*.

One of Mrs. Poyser's sage aphorisms was, that 'It's poor eating where the flavour o' the meat lies i' the cruets.' But there are exceptions, and with the wild duck a suitable and stimulating sauce is half the battle. Here are two of Mistress Dods' best, and, in my opinion, there are no better. She shares my respect for Mr. Pleydell, and the first is christened after him:—'To a quarter-pint of savoury brown gravy put a glass of claret or port, pepper, salt, cayenne, and a dessert-spoonful of finely-shred eschalot. Heat it and pour it over the ducks.' 'Add mustard and a stronger seasoning,' she says, 'for wild geese or the more fishy waterfowl.' Her mention of claret shows the old Scottish predilection for that wine, as there can be no question that the fuller-flavoured vintage of Oporto is preferable. Her second sauce is the Marquis's, and I am abroad as to the noble epicure who gave that sauce his name. The Marquis, likewise, holds for the Bordeaux. 'A glass of claret, a spoonful of catsup, the same of lemon-juice, a minced eschalot, thin slices of lemon-rind, a little cayenne, with two blades of mace pounded. Simmer these ingredients for a few minutes, and then strain in the gravy which comes from the wild-fowl in roasting.'

Margaret Syme, another Scottish woman, goes for

the orthodox port, and suggests the addition of a spoonful of Harvey. But when all is said, there is really small reason to trouble over these elaborately compounded sauces. You can hardly do better than treat the birds for yourself with the sympathetic abstraction of Theodore Burton: slash the bosoms and flush them freely with an infusion of heated port, lemon juice, and Nepaul.

Most that has been said as to ducks applies equally to wild geese, always remembering that the geese are stronger of flavour at the best and demand more powerful treatment. They are seldom to be seen at the London poulterers, and are generally sold for a song. Soyer, in his learned work 'The Pantrophean,' reminds us that, tame or wild, they were appreciated in the classical ages of Greece and Rome. The geese saved the Capitol, and the Romans showed their gratitude by giving them an honoured place at their banquets. Their flights came almost to the city gates, in what are known now as the Pontine Marshes, when the vast wheat-fields of the great half-drained *latifolia* were interspersed with swamp and sedgy pools. I never heard of a wild goose boiled, in modern times, but Soyer quotes from Pliny a recipe for wild goose boiled *à la Gauloise.* Also he gives an Apician seasoning from the liver, for it is to be noted

that the Romans anticipated the Alsatians in the idea of promoting liver disease and making *pâtés de foie gras*. There is no greater contrast than in the diet and habits of the domesticated goose and his wild congeners, though the make is much the same and the cooking almost identical. The chief difference is that the former is often thrice the weight of the latter, which seldom exceeds nine pounds. The tame bird waddles from the stackyard to the orchard, and strays on to the common, stuffing on anything, from grain and fallen apples, acorns or chestnuts, to rank grass and garbage. Still he is always more or less savoury eating, and goes naturally with sage stuffing and apple sauce. The wild goose is of even more hazardous quality than the wild ducks. Some species at all times are absolutely unedible, others may be excellent, or very much the reverse. With the best of the breeds it is always a question of food, of distance from the sea, and good living. Colonel Dodge, in his 'Hunting Grounds of the Great West,' says that the strong convoys and flying expeditions of the American troops on the Prairies relied very much for the commissariat on geese and ducks. The Brandt geese—our Brent—were the largest and most savoury. After the young had commenced feathering they were delicious, and the eggs, when fresh, were

more delicate than those of the domestic goose. The troopers went in for bird-nesting extraordinary, for the nests were often in the lofty cotton trees forty or fifty feet above the ground. When Audubon was at St. Louis, in 1843, the market there was swamped with both ducks and geese. The geese sold at ten cents a-piece; the canvas-backs went at a shilling a couple. And in Maryland now the celery-feeding wild geese are scarcely less appreciated than the canvas-back ducks.

We have no such good luck with them in our little sea-girt islands, where they come from the bleak north as birds of passage, and have to forage casually for a precarious livelihood. The wildest and most wary of all living creatures, for stalking the red deer is a joke to circumventing the greylag, their nerves must be always highly strung. The lag, by the way, is said to have got its name because it is the last to leave us for the northern breeding grounds. Pennant tells us 'it was esteemed most esculent meat,' but the fact is the flesh is somewhat coarse, though not to be despised after some weeks of pillage in the fresh-sown corn-fields. The white-fronted goose is more common, though quite as shy, and, on the whole, less worth eating. However the bean goose came by his designation—which is disputed—there is no doubt

about his partiality for the bean-fields. He quickly puts on flesh and assimilates the rich bean flavour. And instinct seems to bring the bean goose to our fields while the beans are being gathered and the wheat-fields cut.

Wild geese are shot in the cool autumn, and will bear any amount of keeping. Indeed, we have known old sportsmen who said that, like water-hen, they gained by being wrapped in canvas and buried for a day or two. That was a practice successfully adopted by Breton and Norman peasants with their pigs, when the oppressive tax made the price of salt prohibitory. As for the Solan goose, it is a delicacy I have never tasted. Michael Scott, in 'The Cruise of the Midge,' makes the Celtic Jamaica planter, Rory McGregor, talk of the birds contemptuously, in answer to a remark as to the Grecian philosopher: 'I ken o' nae Solans, sir, put tae filthy ill-faured pirds tut leeves in tae water.' All the same, there was a time when the Solans were esteemed in southland Scottish cookery. Walter Scott makes the Solan figure at the Antiquary's dinner, when Sir Arthur departed in dudgeon to come to trouble between the tide and the cliffs. On that occasion the goose was a failure, for it came to table 'blood-raw'; but Sir Walter speaks of it as 'the relishing Solan, whose

smell is so powerful that he is never cooked within doors.' Meg Dods says that 'smoked solans are well known as contributing to the abundance of a Scottish breakfast.' I fancy they were more generally eaten as a whet before dinner, in the Russian or Scandinavian fashion, where northern stomachs of iron preface the indigestible with the more indigestible. Could the Solan's digestion have been communicated to the diners, nothing could have been more *apropos*. For of all the voracious sea-fowl, the Solan has the most inexhaustible flow of gastric juice; when not fishing or sleeping it is always stuffing, and if scared on the ledge in the midst of a meal, it throws up what it swallowed last, to recover it if the alarm passes. Cooking and smoking may melt the grease and evaporate the essential oils, but it must always be saturated with the flavour of herring or haddock.

Roasting a wild goose is much like roasting the tame goose, and both, as I said, may or must be kept almost indefinitely. For several days before roasting it is rubbed with salt and sometimes parboiled. When shot fresh from the corn or the bean fields, the parboiling may be dispensed with. With both satisfactory stuffing is an essential, but with the wild bird the savour of the stuffing should be stronger. It is to be made of onions, sage, thyme, and chopped

liver, with butter, yolk of eggs, and bread crumbs. A brisk fire is necessary, with two or two and a half hours to roast, according to size. Sometimes the goose is stuffed with chestnuts, but where wild geese are most common, chestnuts are scarce, and however admirably they go with turkey or geese, they are rather wasted, as truffles would be. Braising makes a good variation. Truss as if you were going to boil. Envelop in bacon, and flood the stewpan with sauce. Put in the goose with the giblets, and a seasoning of strong herbs, cover with herbs and cambric paper, close the lid of the stewpan, and cover again with a cloth, so that the lid may be saturated with the fragrant steam. The same sauces may be recommended for geese as for ducks, though peppers and all other pungent ingredients may be used with a more unsparing hand. For I end as I began, and the conclusion of the whole matter is that wild geese are always a hazardous speculation, and at the best can scarcely be considered a delicacy.

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